CLASSICS OF DETECTIVE FICTION

Week 1: Ross Macdonald, *Barbarous Coast*
Week 2: Henning Mankell, *Dogs of Riga*
Week 3: Ian Rankin, *Black and Blue*
Week 4: David Pirie, *Dark Water*
Week 5: Howard Engel, *There Was an Old Woman*
Week 6: Sarah Paretsky, *Critical Mass*
FUNCTION OF DETECTIVE FICTION

- Analytical: To solve a puzzle.
- Social: To probe social, political, spiritual issues.
- Aesthetic: To present the puzzle and the issues in an artful, pleasing manner.
- Escape: To provide fantasy and escape from the everyday.
ELEMENTS OF DETECTIVE FICTION

- Appealing detective to guide readers through puzzle.
- Detailed environment described with imagination, humour, poetry, horror.
- Complex characters representing social reality and social fantasy.
- Conclusion of justice.
DETECTIVE STORY ORIGINS

- 1840s: Rationality to control primitive impulses; gothic/monstrous crime; Poe.
- 1843-1844: Emotions/melodrama over rational industrialism; Dickens.
- 1890s-1910s: Scientific method, deductive reasoning, genius sleuth vs. genius criminal; Holmes/Conan Doyle.
**DETECTIVE STORY ORIGINS**

- **1914-1930s**: British Golden Age; questioning social order and/or maintaining status quo; GKC, Christie.
- **1930s-1950s**: Criticism of city corruption, crime, loose morals; “hardboiled” prose, “noir;” Hammett, Chandler.
1950s-1960s: Psychological/social analysis and realism; R. Macdonald.

1960s-1970s: Noir spawns niche genres → regionalism and social issues:
- European noir and social criticism: Scandinavian/Tartan Noir; Mankell and Rankin.
DETECTIVE STORY ORIGINS

- Romantic/Victorian eras: Re-imagining British society/social problems; Pirie.
- Canadian crime: Distinguishing Canada from U.S./Br.; working against noir but also within it; Engel.
- Feminist noir: Liberalism; against noir’s anti-feminism but applies “male” traits to women; Paretsky.
What is noir?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K77aPil7btM
ROSS MACDONALD

- 1915, Born in California, U.S.
- 1919, Moves to Ontario; father leaves the family.
- 1920-32, Unsettled schooling and housing.
- 1932, Enrolls in Waterloo College using insurance legacy from father’s death.
- 1938, Graduation; meets classmate Margaret at graduation and marries after.
ROSS MACDONALD

- 1944-46, Margaret successful as detective novelist/screenwriter; moves to LA area.
- 1944-46, Macdonald navy officer; publishes first novel, *Dark Tunnel*.
- 1947-48, *Blue City* and *Moving Target*.
- 1949, Publishes first book as “John McDonald.”
ROSS MACDONALD

- 1950, *Drowning Pool*.
- 1951, Defends PhD; possible suicide attempt; daughter’s behavioural problems; undergoes psychoanalysis.
- 1955, *Barbarous Coast*; Linda’s car accident/trial; Freudian analysis.
ROSS MACDONALD

- 1959, *Galton Case* (major break with 30s noir); Linda’s disappearance; heart attack.
- 1960s, Sells Archer stories to TV; writes series of best novels: *The Chill* (‘64), *Black Money* (‘66); *The Good-Bye Look* (‘69).
ROSS MACDONALD

- 1970, Linda dies in sleep; environmental activism.
- 1983, Dies.
MACDONALD CHARACTERISTICS

- Context: Reflects post-WWII values gap; searching for new values in materialistic world; from cynicism to understanding.
- Influences: Coming out of noir tradition; by 1960s adapting genre to suit new values (mythology, psychoanalysis) -> existentialism, self-reflection
REATIONS – GROUPS/PARTNERS

- Have you read Macdonald before?
- What were you initial reactions while reading *Barbarous Coast*?
- Did the characters, setting, tone, or point of view leave any impressions on you?
MACDONALD CHARACTERISTICS

- Style: Elegance, simplicity; striking similies; psychological observation.
- Narrative: 1\textsuperscript{st} person = voice of Archer → sensitive tone; mercy not justice sought.
- Structure: Family sagas, hidden relations; “tragedies of the privileged;” uncovering and understanding = story of discovery.
MACDONALD CHARACTERISTICS

- Themes: Nothing can be hidden; all crimes will out.
- Web of influences: nothing we do is without impact on someone else.
- Psychological baggage: mistreated children by sinful mothers/fathers → mental neuroses → violence.
THE BARBAROUS COAST

- Detective: Lew Archer, developing sensitivity and disgust with corruption; not cynical; exercising compassion.

- Secondary characters:
  - Retired boxer: Victim of prejudice, class; race/religion differences; dignity
  - Young boxer: Social ambitions; looser morals; consumer.
THE BARBAROUS COAST

- Mob: Behind most businesses, seeking legitimacy.
- Movie industry execs: Culture of privilege, exploitation, subterfuge; rewriting reality.
- Outsiders: Lifeguard, Archer, newspaper reporter, nurse/sister → Looking for a new way to live (362-363)
SETTING

Santa Teresa (aka Santa Barbara), CA:
- Mental institution = Shelter for madness and wealthy; benign or dangerous?
- Athletic club = Stage for social hierarchies to play out (staff vs. members), resentments, hidden hatreds.
- Las Vegas = Wasteland for vice.
- Ocean = Purity made a site of human vice.
Hester/Lance socially ambitious, using blackmail to make new life.
Leads to entanglements with mob-backed movie world.
Disappearance of Hester brings Archer into world of false relations/identities.
Pursuit exposes true causes of death.
With truth exposed, Tony is set up to seek revenge. Archer protects him by manipulating evidence.
Youth are “punished” for their social ambitions by death.
“Wholesome” values are renewed with the safety of the nurse/sister and husband.
ARCHER AND FILM

- Paul Newman, “The Drowning Pool” (1975)
- Brian Keith, “Archer” (1975, NBC series)