

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1960s, mystery and detective fiction has become an integral part of the school curriculum and is no longer regarded as mere entertainment or as an inferior branch of literature. Now, a writer such as Raymond Chandler, who wrote scripts for Hollywood and stories for pulp magazines of the 1930s and 1940s, has become required reading in high school and college courses. In a University of New Hampshire graduate course, "Form and Theory of Fiction," Chandler is included alongside celebrated mainstream authors such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Cormac McCarthy. The New Hampshire course explores Chandler's use of dialogue, structure, characterization, metaphor, and narrative and is implicitly suggesting that his methods stand up to the most rigorous analysis. Other mystery and detective writers, such as James M. Cain, Horace McCoy, and Cornell Woolrich, whose novels were originally published in paperback editions and later adapted for Hollywood films, have now been canonized in such prestigious publications as Library of America editions.

What accounts for this upgrading of a genre that once was considered merely formulaic, too predictable and stereotypical to rise to the heights of great literature? Major critics in the 1930s and 1940s, such as Edmund Wilson, scorned the "whodunit," the cozy mystery, the thriller, the police procedural—in short, all the variations of a *modus operandi* that always led to the solving of crimes and melodramatic conflicts between good and evil. Such genre fiction was denigrated as simplistic on the grounds that it allegedly did not deserve the critic's measured attention, at least according to Wilson.

In part, even the best mystery and detective fiction was devalued precisely because it was popular, and many critics, especially those in academe, associated the greatest literature with a smaller elite or coterie of

sophisticated readers. The modernist credo of critics demanded literature that was difficult and required skill in decoding. Works such as James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* (1922) were considered the epitome of what serious readers should expect from great literature. Even the nineteenth-century English novelist Charles Dickens, now considered one of the great writers in the Western canon, was not considered worthy of inclusion among the authors in what influential critic F. R. Leavis deemed "The Great Tradition."

Despite all this, college and high school courses today include mystery and detective fiction in their units on "critical thinking." The Yale-New Haven Teacher's Institute, for example, has offered a course titled "Detective Fiction: Focus on Critical Thinking" that aims to sharpen students' ability to interpret evidence and even to come to terms with the phenomena of their daily lives. At its heart, detective fiction is about problem solving, the course syllabus notes. Consequently, the genre can be used across the curriculum in the humanities and sciences—indeed in any course in which word *problems* must be solved. A detailed lesson plan on the institute's Web site, which also included a bibliography and references to journal articles about the value of teaching detective fiction, demonstrated just how significant a role the genre had come to play in pedagogy in the twenty-first century. If anything, crime and mystery fiction have now become the focus of far more abundant and serious critical attention now than was true at the turn of the century. A look at the bibliographies included in this set suggest just how much new academic work has been published about "detective" fiction in the last twenty years. A search of any good library's catalog will offer even more evidence to support this claim.

For decades now, libraries have disseminated on the Web reading lists and articles about collection man-

National Park in 1993, where she worked for two years before leaving the park service to work full-time on her writing.

In 1993, Barr published her first mystery novel, *Track of the Cat*, set in Guadalupe National Park, where she had previously worked. This novel won the 1994 Agatha Award for best first novel and the 1994 Anthony Award for best novel. Subsequent novels also have garnered a number of nominations and awards. *Firestorm* (1996) was nominated for the Anthony Award for best novel and was awarded France's Prix du Roman d'Aventure. *Blind Descent* (1998) was nominated for both an Anthony Award and a Macavity Award. *Deep South* (2000) also received an Anthony Award nomination. Barr and her second husband, former National Park Service ranger Richard Jones, live in New Orleans, Louisiana.

ANALYSIS

Nevada Barr's mystery series featuring National Park Service ranger Anna Pigeon is unusual among series featuring a female sleuth in that the novels do not fit neatly into any one genre of mystery and detective fiction. On one hand, Anna is certainly a kind of private investigator, hard-boiled in her self-imposed isolation from others as well as independent, for the most part, from family and romantic liaisons that limit her ability to move from park to park without consequence. Though she maintains connections with her psychologist sister Molly, her sister lives in New York City while Anna traipses from park to park across the United States. Indeed, the nature of the park service, as outlined in Barr's *Track of the Cat*, suggests that most park workers do not stay in one park indefinitely so as not to become too invested in one area. Though Anna goes to New York when Molly becomes gravely ill in the seventh novel in the series, *Liberty Falling* (1999), neither Molly's illness in this novel nor Anna's marriage to local sheriff and minister Paul Davidson in *Hard Truth* (2005) limit Anna's involvement in solving crimes nor the necessary traveling. Even when Anna falls in love—twice during the series, first with Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent Frederick Stanton, who will eventually pair with her sister Molly, and second with Davidson—she resists putting herself in any emotionally needy situation. Furthermore, with Anna's general cynicism, she can maintain a level of objectivity that serves her well

when investigating crimes. Like her hard-boiled predecessors, Anna regularly gets shot, beat up, pushed down mountains, and kidnapped without deterring her from resuming the investigation the next day.

Although she has the personality and many other qualities of a hard-boiled private investigator, Anna's job actually involves her in quasi-police work. Though she often has to concede to local police authorities or FBI operatives while investigating a case, her position in the park allows her to carry weapons and enforce the laws of the parks. In this regard, Barr's novels suggest the police procedural. Anna must follow the protocol of her job regarding the gathering of evidence and the interrogation of suspects. Though her authority is sometimes undermined by those higher in command in the park service, Anna, unlike private investigators, is a central character at a crime scene.

Despite her tough demeanor and her savvy police skills, Anna Pigeon often approaches crime as would an amateur sleuth. Although no one pays her to discover the truth behind a crime, Anna goes beyond her park ranger responsibilities to solve mysteries. These explorations manage to put her into extraordinarily dangerous situations without much forethought or management on her part. For example, she might be taking a walk late at night when she discovers a clue that might lead to a killer. Instead of calling for backup or pursuing the lead in the morning, Anna might walk into a trap. Furthermore, she often seems ill-equipped to handle these emergencies even though she inevitably triumphs by the end of the novel.

Barr's use of national parks as settings for her works allows a level of integrity often missing from series that involve an amateur detective. Though private investigators and police officers might have a never-ending caseload that could be the basis for multiple novels, park rangers typically do not see crime on such a scale. The very nature of the itinerant park ranger, however, allows Barr to transport Anna Pigeon to a variety of new settings with new possibilities for crimes. Because the crimes occur at different parks, Anna's repeated investigation of so much murderous activity does not strain credulity.

The national park settings also add a further dimension to Barr's tightly woven, often psychological mysteries. Anna Pigeon revels in the unique surroundings of each park at which she works.

ber 23, 1990, p. N2. Brief profile of Cook that examines his fictional writing and his first true-crime book, *Early Graves*.

Lee, Michael. "The South Rises Again and Again." *The Barnstable Patriot* (October 2003). This brief article describes how Cook is representative of a new breed of southern writer in step with modern life. Much of Cook's fiction is based in his home state of Georgia and has southern themes as its primary focus.

Shankman, Sarah. Introduction to *A Confederacy of Crime*. New York: Signet, 2001. The purpose of this collection of short stories was to compile a selection of the best unpublished mysteries describing life in the Deep South. Besides Cook, authors include Jeffrey Deaver, Steven Womack, and Julie Smith.

PATRICIA CORNWELL

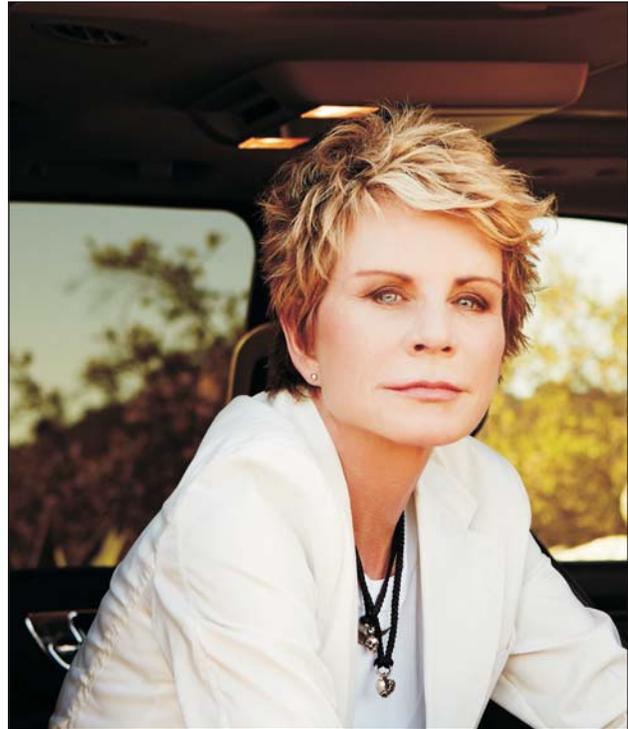
Types of Plot: Hard-boiled; police procedural; psychological

Principal Series: Kay Scarpetta, 1990-; Andy Brazil, 1997- ; Callisto Chase, 2019- ;

PRINCIPAL SERIES CHARACTERS:

Dr. Kay Scarpetta is Virginia's chief medical examiner. She is a striking blonde woman who is such a brilliant and famous forensic pathologist/detective that she becomes the obsession of several psychopathic serial killers. She enjoys gardening and cooking the northern Italian dishes of her ethnic heritage. She is "Auntie Kay" to Lucy Farinelli, the only child of her sister Dorothy, who frequently leaves her daughter in Scarpetta's care. As Lucy grows from a ten-year-old to a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent and finally the founder of her own private investigating firm, Scarpetta also branches out. She becomes an FBI consultant, colludes with Interpol, and relocates to Florida to become a private forensic consultant.

Andy Brazil is a recent college graduate, reporter, and volunteer police officer in Charlotte, North Carolina. At the request of his editor, he patrols with Deputy Chief Virginia West. His energy and impetuousness anger West and Chief Judy Hammer, yet endear him to them. His unorthodox methods help him crack seemingly impossible cases.



Patricia Cornwell. Photo by Christina Bonello via Wikimedia Commons.

Callisto Chase has recently been called "a cybercrime investigator, a sort of physicist-cum-fixer for Nasa."

CONTRIBUTION

Patricia Cornwell's first work of detective fiction, *Post-mortem* (1990), is the only novel to win five prestigious awards in the same year: the Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America, the John Creasey Award from the Crime Writers' Association, the Anthony Award sponsored by Bouchercon, World Mystery Convention, and the Macavity Award from Mystery Readers International, all for best debut crime novel, and the French Prix du Roman d'Aventure. The book stood out because of its protagonist as well as its approach of using forensics to solve a crime. Dr. Kay Scarpetta is a tough yet vulnerable female medical examiner. In 1999, the character of Scarpetta won the Sherlock Award for the best fictional detective created by an American author. Although Scarpetta comes into contact with suspects more often and more closely than real-life medical examiners actually do, crimes are solved in Scarpetta's mind and on her autopsy table. As she examines the victims' bodies, she

T. JEFFERSON PARKER

Types of Plot: California noir fiction; numerous standalone books

Principal Series: *Merci Rayborn*, 1970- ; *Charlie Hood*, 2008- ; *Roland Ford*, 2017- ;

PRINCIPAL SERIES CHARACTERS:

Charlie Hood, a Los Angeles-area lawman who investigates crimes while trying to cope with demons from his own past.

Merci Rayborn, a feisty young detective who solves crimes while working with her older, more experience partner, Tim Hess.

Roland Ford, a San Diego private investigator—a Marine veteran of the Gulf War—with a philosophical bent.

CONTRIBUTION

In addition to creating various mystery series, T. Jefferson Parker, in his 2001 award-winning standalone novel *Silent Joe*, is one of many recent authors who have featured disabled (or, in this case, disfigured) characters in major roles. When Jane Davis asked



T. Jefferson Parker. Photo by Mark Coggins via Wikimedia Commons.

Parker in an interview why he had chosen to create such a character, he replied, “It just goes back to the basic proposition that what’s inside a human being is supposed to be more important than how he or she looks. We all say that, but do we live it? I’ve written lots of characters who look good but act rotten. So in a way I’m reversing that situation.” He added: “Joe compensates for his appearance by developing what he thinks are impeccable manners.... There’s something almost Japanese about Joe. He feels shame. That’s a lost art in this society.... Joe’s the only one of my heroes who isn’t world weary in some way. He’s fresh, strong, and confident, like a bull first coming into the ring.” Joe, however, never became the subject of a series; instead, he was the focus of the many novels Parker has written that stand by themselves. In an interview with *bookbrowse.com*, Parker remarked, “I particularly enjoy writing stand-alone novels. Stand-alones demand a different kind of storytelling from a series novel, perhaps more complete than what is required for the episodic nature of a series.”

Nevertheless, his series have been immensely popular. When the unnamed interviewer in the *bookbrowse.com* discussion noted that loss seems to be a theme that runs throughout his fiction, whether in stand-alone novels or in series, Parker agreed, explaining, “Loss just seems to me such a common, universal thing. I mean in the end you’re stripped of everything, even your heartbeat. And along the way you will lose many, many things. No one is immune. Everyone can understand it.”

BIOGRAPHY

T. Jefferson Parker was born on December 26, 1953 in Los Angeles and grew up in Southern California. The T. is not an initial; his parents said that it would look nice on a presidential door. Parker grew up in a family of storytellers and readers. His mother read to him frequently; she read darker books such as the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm. The family had an extensive library in their home and the children were encouraged to use it as often as they liked.

Parker was educated in Orange County public schools and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in English from the University of California, Irvine, in 1976. He was honored in 1992 as a Distinguished Alumnus of the university. After graduation, Parker decided that he wanted to write for a living.

of religious sacrifice for the Central American Indian tribes. Paine's obsession with the vampire bat reflects the intricacy of humans' relationship with animals; in Paine's case, killing the animals meant killing himself.

GORKY PARK

Vulnerability and romance are shared by the mismatched lovers in *Gorky Park*, Irina Asanova and Arkady Renko. The crucial difference between them is that Renko is Russian, but Irina, though born in the Soviet Union, refuses to be Russian. Renko's involvement with Irina is highly dangerous because she is a dissident whose principal goal is to emigrate. Their attraction, like that of Smith's other couples, is intensely physical and develops from sex to love.

In *Gorky Park*, however, though the lovers pass their test, they are not given a happily-ever-after ending. After Renko and Asanova have endured KGB questioning regarding the months during which Renko was recovering from his stab wound, the couple is together in New York City. Asanova has acted as Osborne's lover so that Osborne would bring Renko to New York. The mark of her love for Renko is not, however, prostituting herself for him; she had already prostituted herself to get out of the Soviet Union. The test of her love, instead, is her willingness to go back with him, as she first asserts in New York and reaffirms in their final words to each other:

She took a dozen steps. "Will I ever hear from you?" She looked back, her eyes haggard and wet.

"No doubt. Messages get through, right? Times change."

At the gate she stopped again. "How can I leave you?"

"I am leaving you."

The words "Times change" suggest that there may be for this couple some hope for the future. Most of Smith's mysteries end with some expression of hope of a future together for the mismatched couple.

The relationship between man and animal is further explored in *Gorky Park*, in which the caged sables

being smuggled to America become a metaphor for an ironic and perverse sort of freedom. The three murder victims in *Gorky Park* were caring for and helping to smuggle sables; the victims were living in a shack, their own cage, feeding the other caged victims. Renko considers the pathos in their circumstances as he investigates the crime. In the end, Renko cannot shoot the sables that have been smuggled to America. Just as he frees Irina Asanova, he ends by freeing the sables, once again meting out justice.

Much loved by readers, Arkady Renko returned in a number of bestselling adventures. Renko is at sea, literally, on a Russian fishing vessel in *Polar Star* (1989), and he explores the seamy underbelly of postcommunist Moscow in *Red Square* (1992). However, the Renko in *Havana Bay* (1999) is a shadow of his former self and intent only on dying. While trying to kill himself, he is attacked and instinctively fights back, only to regret his natural response to self-preservation. When asked to locate an old friend, the reluctant hero travels to Cuba and is immersed in intrigue—enough to keep his suicidal thoughts at bay. The corrupt, burgeoning wealthy class of *Red Square* has fully matured into the uniquely Russian world of oligarchs in *Wolves Eat Dogs* (2004). The apparent suicide of one of these new capitalist princes leads Renko from a pile of salt in the dead man's closet to the dead zone of Chernobyl.

A stickler for research, Smith finds inspiration for his characters and the predicaments in which he sets them in landscapes that resonate with cultural and historical importance. Although Smith has never been at a loss to find ample material in contemporary Russia, he has also set his detectives to work in wartime Japan and Manchuria on *December 6* (2002), in New Mexico for the Manhattan Project in *Stallion Gate*, and in a dismal Victorian mining town in the north of England in *Rose* (1996). Whether writing about a Russian investigator or Gypsy antique dealer, the CIA or the KGB, Los Alamos or Moscow, Smith, dubbed the "master-craftsman of the good read," by Tony Hillerman, continues to deliver in the new millennium.

—Janet T. Palmer; updated by Fiona Kelleghan and Janet Alice Long

- ripper*: Slang for safecracker.
- robbery*: Taking another's property within the owner's presence by force or the threat of force.
- rock*: Slang for diamond. See also ice.
- rub out, to*: Slang for to kill.
- rube*: Slang for easy mark.
- safe house*: Slang for secure location in which it is safe to conduct secret meetings.
- safety paper*: Slang for passport paper.
- safety signals*: Slang for sign system used by espionage agents to indicate when it is safe to meet.
- sanction*: Espionage term for a counter-assassination.
- sap*: Slang for fool; also, to hit a person on the head, as with a blackjack, to render the person unconscious.
- scam*: Slang for fraudulent operation or scheme.
- Scotland Yard*: Headquarters of the detective department of the London metropolitan police.
- scratch*: Slang for money.
- screw*: Slang for prison guard.
- search warrant*: Judicial order allowing police to enter and search a particular location.
- second-story man*: Burglar who typically enters buildings through upper-story windows.
- serial offender*: Criminal who repeatedly commits the same types of crimes, often with the same modus operandi.
- shake the tree, to*: Slang for to do things to cause a target to panic and accelerate an illegal operation that is being watched.
- shakedown*: Slang for act of extortion.
- shamus*: Slang for detective, usually private.
- sharper*: Slang for swindler.
- shiv*: Slang for knife.
- shoemaker*: Slang for forger.
- shoo-fly*: Slang for plainclothes policeman, usually assigned to investigate the honesty of uniformed police.
- shopsold*: Espionage term for agent whose cover is no longer effective.
- shylock*: Slang for loan shark.
- shyster*: Slang for unscrupulous person, especially a lawyer.
- silence, to*: Slang for to kill.
- sing, to*: Slang for to inform, confess secrets.
- sister*: Slang for woman.
- sitting-duck position*: Slang for exposed and vulnerable position during a fight.
- skip, to*: Slang for to leave town after being told by authorities to remain.
- skirt*: Slang for woman.
- slammer*: Slang for prison.
- sleep, to*: Slang for to wait for a long time before commencing espionage activity.
- slug*: Slang for bullet.
- smacker*: Slang for one dollar.
- snatch, to*: Slang for to kidnap, abduct.
- snitch*: Slang for informer.
- snuff out, to*: Slang for to kill.
- sob story*: Slang for sad account of personal misfortunes, usually calculated to arouse sympathy in the hearer.
- solicitor*: British term for a lawyer who represents clients but does not argue cases in court, as a barrister does. A solicitor, unlike a barrister, can conduct litigation for a client.
- sound thief*: Slang for hidden microphone.
- spring, to*: Slang for to aid an escape from prison.
- sprung*: Slang for released.
- square*: Slang for honest.
- squeal, to*: Slang for to complain or protest; to inform to the police.
- squealer*: Slang for informer.
- squeeze*: Slang for extortion, graft.
- stash, to*: Slang for to hide something; a hiding place; a cache.
- static post*: Slang for fixed surveillance position.
- stick-and-carrot job*: Slang for use of bribes and threats together to obtain information.
- stick-up*: Slang for robbery.
- stiff, to*: Slang for to be drunk; a dead body; a stupid or drunk person; an average, common man.
- stir*: Slang for prison.
- stooge*: Slang for underling, especially one who is a puppet of another.
- stool pigeon*: Slang for informer, usually a police informer.
- stoolie*: Slang for stool pigeon.
- subpoena*: Order for a witness to appear in court to testify.
- sucker*: Slang for easily deceived person, an easy victim.
- Surete General*: First modern police force, established in France during the early nineteenth century.
- swag*: Slang, particularly in British usage, for loot.
- sweat, to*: Slang for to interrogate with the use of physical force.