

# Grade 9 English

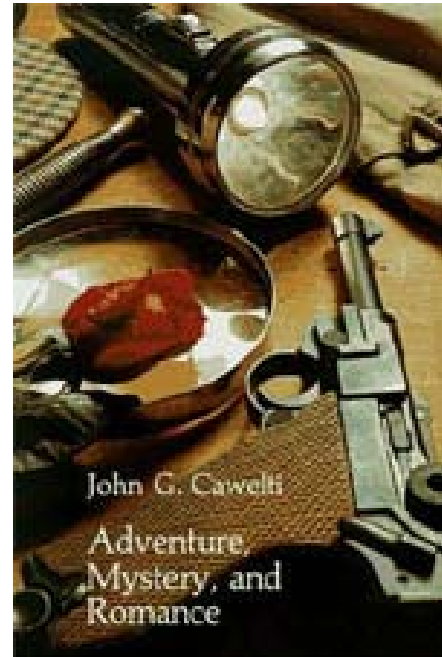
## Class 16 Notes

### The remainder of the course...

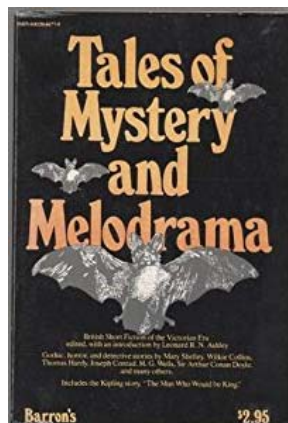
- We read Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein*, during the first half of the course. For the second half, we're studying Agatha Christie's detective novel, *Murder on the Orient Express*. We will also be doing lots of poetry analysis.
- While some highbrow literary critics may dismiss detective novels as light popular fiction that isn't worthy of serious consideration, we will study the genre and uncover its classical elements.
- For the next few weeks, we will rely on the theoretical work of a literary critic, John G. Cawelti, to deepen our analysis of Christie's novel. But who is Cawelti?

## Who is John G. Cawelti?

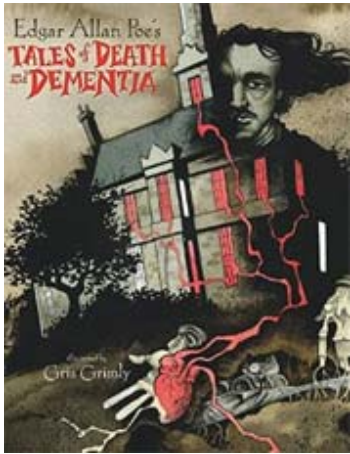
- Cawelti was regarded as a pioneer in making the study of popular culture an academically respectable endeavour.
- We will be reading the chapter, “The Formula of the Classical Detective Story,” in his academic book *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (published in 1976).
- But first, let’s think more broadly about popular culture. What is pop culture? Can you share your favourite items in pop culture? Are there predictable elements in certain pop culture elements (like pop songs, movies, T.V. series, graphic novels etc.)?



According to Cawelti, “The changing cultural mythology of crime has given rise to many different popular formulas. Some of these have been essentially adventure stories or melodramas, but one of the most striking embodies the cultural mythology of detectives, criminals, police, and suspects in an archetypal form that is almost pure mystery.”



“The classical or ratiocinative detective story was first clearly articulated by Edgar Allan Poe in the 1840s, but it did not become a widely popular genre until the end of the nineteenth century. Its period of greatest popularity was initiated by the enormous success of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, and it flourished in the first four decades of the twentieth century.” (Cawelti)

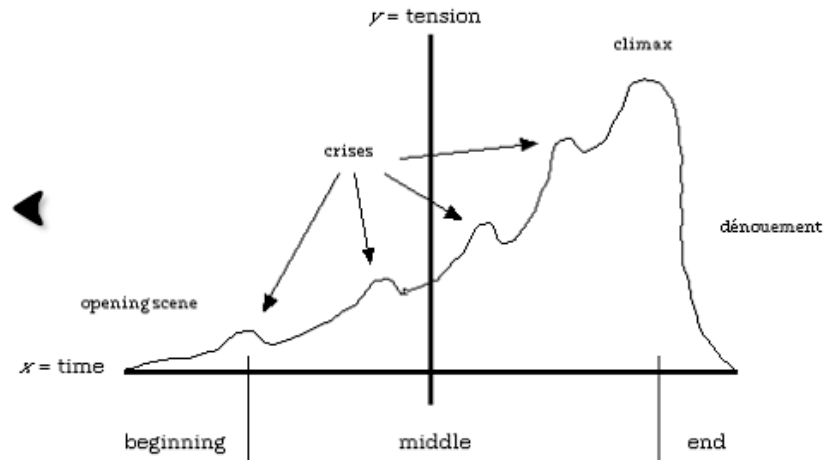


“The formula of the classical detective story can be described as a conventional way of defining and developing a particular kind of situation or situations, a pattern of action or development of this situation, a certain group of characters and the relations between them, and a setting or type of setting appropriate to the characters and action.” (Cawelti)

$$P_M(x) = \sum_{i=1}^{\infty} 2^{-|s_i(x)|}$$

Let's think: Why is it helpful to describe the formula of the classical detective story, or any "classical" item in popular culture?

“The classical detective story begins with an unsolved crime and moves toward the elucidation of its mystery.” (Cawelti)



“As Poe, discovered in his two stories, the mystery may center upon the identity and motive of the criminal, as in the case of "Rue Morgue," or, with the criminal and his purposes known, the problem may be to determine the means or to establish clear evidence of the criminal's deed, as in the case of "The Purloined Letter" where the detective must determine where the Minister D. has concealed the letter.” (Cawelti)

“Poe also defined two major types of crime on which much detective literature bases itself: murder, frequently with sexual or grotesque overtones, and crimes associated with political intrigue.” (Cawelti)

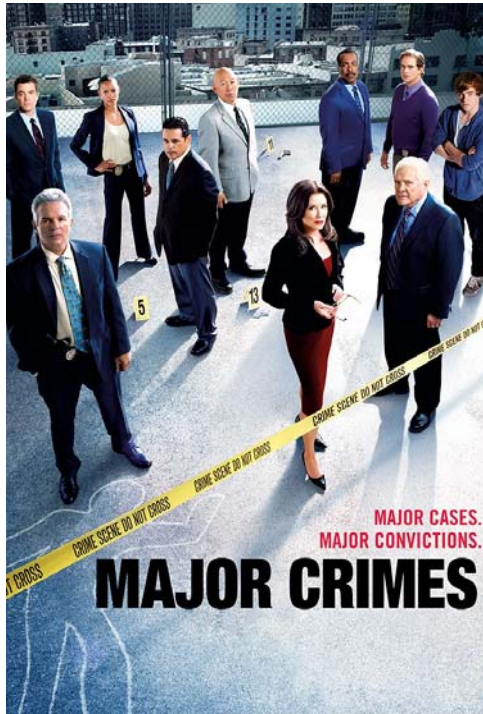
*Let's think: Why should these be the favourite crimes of detective story writers?*



“From a formal point of view it is not difficult to see why these should be the favorite crimes of detective story writers. First of all, the significance of these crimes is proportionate to the elaborate parade of mystification and inquiry that the detective story must generate.” (Cawelti)







“The crime must be a major one with the potential for complex ramifications, but the victim cannot really be mourned or the possible complexities of the situation allowed to draw our attention away from the detective and his investigation.” (Cawelti)

*Let's think: Why can't the victim be mourned?*

“The classical detective usually has little real personal interest in the crime he is investigating. Instead, he is a detached, gentlemanly amateur.” (Cawelti)

*Let's think: Do you know of any example that conforms to, or deviates from, Cawelti's characterization of the classical detective?*

