

Key points from John G. Cawelti's "The Formula of the Classical Detective Story"

Pattern of Action: The Announcement of the Solution (Part 3, Week 18)

Recap

- We talked about Cawelti's discussion of the situation and two major elements in the pattern of action: the coolly rational detective and the crime.

The announcement of the solution

According to Cawelti, “The announcement of the solution is as important as, perhaps in some instances more important than, the actual apprehension and punishment of the criminal.”

Why do you think that's the case?

Mystery Plot Template Cheatsheet	
Act One	
Present the crime	
Introduce the sleuth	
Offer plausible suspects	
Introduce crime complications	
Introduce private life subplot	
Act Two	
Initial investigations and interrogations reveal clues	
Disappearance of one suspect	
Raise the stakes	
Development of sub plot	
Act Three	
Reveal hidden motives of stakeholders	
Unsatisfying solution reached	
Return to overlooked clue from act one	
Resolution of subplot	
Confrontation with perpetrator	

The announcement of the solution



“[T]he frantic narrator who is hopelessly lost in the maze of clues and testimony and the supremely calm detective who now takes the action into his hands. . . . Naturally, since the action of the classical story focuses on the investigation of a mystery, the detective's calm announcement that he has arrived at the solution is a climactic moment. This is also the turning point of the story in another way.”

The announcement of the solution

“[T]he reader has been forced to follow the action from the confused and limited point of view of the narrator. From this point of view investigation leads only to obfuscation. But when the solution is announced, though technically the point of view does not change, in actuality we now see the action from the detective's perspective. As he explains the situation, what had seemed chaotic and confused is revealed as clear and logical. In addition, this is the point at which the detective usually assumes the initiative against the criminal. Throughout the main part of the story the narrator appears to be surrounded by the plots of a mysterious criminal. After the announcement of the solution, the reader joins the detective in his superior position, assuming the role of spider to the criminal fly. Finally, the special importance of the moment of solution presents the classical writer with the opportunity of having two major climaxes or peaks of tension, the moment of solution and the eventual denouement when the criminal is actually captured.”

