

An authentic American hero — the detective

Gumshoe. Shamus. Hawkshaw. Dick Peeper. Snopce. Sleuth.

"No matter what he is called, the hard-boiled detective, or private eye, is an American institution, as native as jazz, as recognizable as Mickey Mouse, as appealing as apple pie, as durable as the game of baseball," according to Dr. David Geherin of Eastern Michigan University.

A professor in the department of English language and literature, Geherin is author of a new book, "The American Private Eye — The Image in Fiction." For it, he has been nominated for an Edgar Award given for the best work in the area of biography/literary criticism.

The book examines the works of more than two dozen of the most important writers of detective novels. According to Geherin, "The detective is cloaked in many disguises and popularized through a variety of media — pulp magazines, novels, radio dramas, films and television series. He has become one of the most familiar figures in American cultural mythology."

TELEVISION detective series such as "Remington Steele," "Murder She Wrote," "Hart to Hart" and "McMurray," "Black's Magic," "Rockford Files," and "Mike Hammer" have experienced a great deal of popularity and success. But Geherin says this type of story has always been popular and interest has never waned.

"Mysteries in one form or another have always been popular. Ever since the first private eye stories began in the 1920s, this type of writing has been very popular, in magazines, in movies. Even though there have been changes, one type of mystery might be more popular in one era than another type. There is and always has been a large audience for mysteries."

He added, "One reason is that the private eye hero is an authentic American hero."

"The romanticism with the actual American hero, which began in the 19th century with adventurers like Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, has evolved to include modern heroes depicted in movies such as 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' and the 'Grapes of Wrath.'"

"All cultures need heroes because they remind us of what we are capable of accomplishing, they satisfy our own desires for accomplishment in our lives and it makes us feel better that there are people who can achieve. They give us an opportunity to escape and get out of our dull routines."

GEHERIN'S BOOK examines writers of private eye novels from the 1920s and Prohibition through the Depression, World War II, the post-war years, and in the present decade with its changing sex roles. Private eye novels reflect the society of the times. As the times change so do the stories and the characters.

During the period of disillusionment that followed World War I, a new crop of writers came into being. Suddenly, the world was not the orderly place that it used to be where problems were always solved through the use of reason.

"World War I exposed violence and brutality," said Geherin. "The early writers created tough characters instead of those who used intellectual reasoning."

"The characters were those who had to use other means such as fists, guns, guile, shrewdness, street smarts and anything else. Crime was seen as something that could not be solved with a brilliant mind."

WHILE TODAY'S private eye still uses the same survival skills as those

of earlier years, Geherin has found that current writers depict detectives as vulnerable people, as very common men with human qualities.

"They are not perfect and are often lonely men who are unhappy in their private lives. Private eyes are either single or divorced and many have a drinking problem. They are often men with personal unhappiness and problems," he added.

"One of the remarkable things about the private eye novel is that it has attracted such very good writers," Geherin said, citing Raymond Chandler who revolutionized the private eye novel with his unique style.

Chandler, a former businessman, is well known for writing the adventures of superleuth Philip Marlow. And like many other novelists of this

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— author Richard Guerin

genre, Chandler began as a pulp writer.

GEHERIN BELIEVES if it weren't for the pulp magazines, the private eye might never have emerged.

One such magazine, Black Mask, provided the first forum for the ad-

ventures of Race Williams and the Continental Op, the earliest private eye. According to Geherin, a score of other mystery pulps that soon followed its lead made it possible for the fledgling private eye hero to develop in a number of interesting directions.

Many pulp writers faded into ob-

scurely. But a few lucky ones, like Chandler, achieved a lasting audience because their books were published in hardcover.

Geherin discusses the style, the life and the times of many notable writers and their characters. They include Mickey Spillane by Mike Hammer, Lew Archer by Ross McDonald and Dan Fontaine by Michael Collins.

Geherin further points out that there are basic differences between the British detective novel and the American private eye novel. "In the British mystery, the focus is on the 'who dunnit?' and they are largely puzzle mysteries where the detective puts the pieces together, revealing the criminal in the end," he said.

This can be seen in the popular

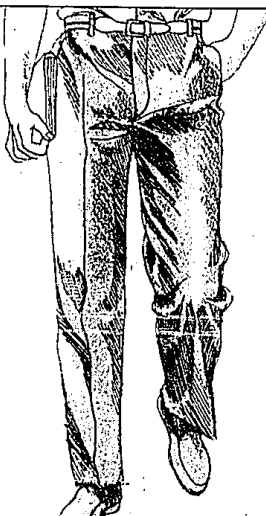
British adventures of Sherlock Holmes and in stories by Agatha Christie.

"THE AMERICAN private eye novel is more realistic in its depiction of character, crime and society, placing the emphasis on the hero of the story," Geherin added, noting the characters are not infallible and often solve crimes through trial and error.

The private eye novel appeals to men and women. "The hero isn't just a macho super man, he's vulnerable, sensitive, courageous and has principles," Geherin said. "A private eye is the type of hero that women in their hearts wish they had married and men in their hearts wish they were really like."

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Crowley's

Workshop on early reading

A reading specialist will hold a two-day workshop for parents — "Reading Begins Naturally at Home" — May 10 and 17 at Michigan State University's Birmingham Center.

It's designed to enable parents of kindergarten-through-third-grade children to begin reading at home.

Specialist Linda Clinard of MSU is author of "The Reading Triangle" and mother of three young children including 24-year-old twin boys.

Enrollment information is available from the center at 645-5410. Cost is \$35 plus \$9 for materials.

OU to close admissions

Because Oakland University will close undergraduate admissions for the fall on July 15, prospective students should apply early for maximum consideration.

But graduate admissions "will probably remain open through late summer," said Keith Kleckner, OU vice president.

The early cut-off was prompted by expected record enrollments for fall and winter, Kleckner said. Enrollment information is available from the office of admissions at 370-3450.