

Possible topics for *The Likeness* papers – ENGL 1158.107 - Lennon

- This novel springs from a highly implausible, but quite tantalizing idea– that of a doppelgänger, or double. This is a common theme in literature, and we have seen it now and then in this class– things or people that look the same, or are copies of one another, or are mirrored in some way. How does French use the idea here to reflect Cassie Maddox's psychological complexity? What does it mean for a detective to go undercover, to pretend to be something she isn't? How can characters, or people for that matter, pretend to be something, and actually be it, at the same time?

- Like several other stories we've read, this novel features a house that sometimes seems as strong a “character” as the people who live in it. Think of the Rue Morgue, or the house in “The Wrong Shape,” or Agatha Christie's maps in *Roger Ackroyd*, or the violated apartment and house in *The Sour Lemon Score*, and write a paper on the role of living spaces in crime fiction.

- Cassie Maddox, like many literary detectives, has difficulty separating the personal from the professional. Write an essay exploring the role of the detective's life in his or her work– investigate how one tends to affect the other, and the extent to which it is even possible to separate the two. Many of our literary sleuths differ from ordinary law enforcers in that they live by a highly personal code of conduct, one that gets them into trouble as often as it helps them solve crimes. Is Cassie like them?

- This is not the first story we've read that takes place in a small town full of secrets, strange traditions, and unusual rules. Indeed, we could generalize more and say that many crime stories are about *subcultures*: Parker's society of thieves, the wealthy enclave of Couffignal, the secret society of “Quitters, Inc.,” and, here, both the village of Glenskehy and the strange miniculture of Whitethorn House. Try writing an essay about small towns and/or subcultures, and the kinds of crimes their rules inspire.

- This book is another fine example of a crime novel heavily connected to the politics of a place and time; Daniel's speech on page 335 is a quite compelling meditation on the problems of his society. Add this to the list of stories we've read that channel the political anxieties of their characters, and write a paper considering the same.

- When Cassie finds Lexie Madison's diary, she decides not to tell Mackie about it. For the rest of the novel, she is highly selective about what information she does and doesn't share. We see this elsewhere in the stories we've written, too: Stenstrom's secret investigation in *The Laughing Policeman*, Poirot's clever give-and-take with Sheppard in *Roger Ackroyd*. Write a paper about information– how writers, and detectives, selectively mete it out to readers and other characters, and why they choose to do so or not.

- We get quite a surprise on 329, when Daniel reveals that he has seen through Cassie's cover. There is then a limited, but highly informative interrogation. You could compare this interrogation to two that appear later: the more elaborated one with the remaining housemates at the end, and the fake one Mackie conducts with Cassie at the police station. Do a paper on investigations in this book and/or others: what purpose they serve, both to the investigator and the reader, and how they work as sources both of information and disinformation. Consider Kollberg's questioning of Asa Torrell in *TLLP*, perhaps, and Poirot's many inquiries in *Roger Ackroyd*.

- There are two murders in this book– Lexie's and Daniel's. Both are morally ambiguous, and at least partly forgiven by other characters. Indeed, there are very few morally uncomplicated murders among the stories we've read– write a paper on the moral ambiguity of violence, and the sliding scale on which we judge the act of murder.