

Possible topics for *The Sour Lemon Score* papers – ENGL 1158.107 - Lennon

- In the introduction to this edition, Dennis Lehane writes, “Parker *is* as bad as he seems.” I’m not so sure. He’s no angel, but Parker does live by a moral code– it isn’t like yours or mine, but it’s there. Indeed, this complicated revenge plot is like a map of his moral code, from his need to track down Uhl at the outset, to his reluctance to kill him at the end. Analyze Parker’s morality in this book, and compare it, if you wish, to the alternate moralities of other protagonists, criminal or otherwise, whom we have read.

- As often seems to be the case, sexuality in this book serves as a powerful currency, a strong motivator, and a vexing impediment. Take note of Joyce Langer’s relationship with Uhl, Madge the ex-prostitute, the two strained marriages in the book (Weiss’s and Saugherty’s), Rosenstein’s troubled relationship to his homosexuality, and his violence against women. Consider also Parker’s apparent asexuality, at least when he’s working a job, which is tempered by his awareness of the power of sex over others.

- In a novel composed of otherwise spare writing, several moments of heavy stylization stand out: for instance Parker’s descent into, and emergence from, unconsciousness in Brock’s apartment, and the slow-motion death of Pearson as the bullet enters his head. Do a study of how violence is portrayed (or not portrayed, as is the case in several things we’ve read) in a few of the class selections.

- Stark chooses an interesting structure for the point of view here: a close third person that sticks with Parker for parts 1, 2, and 4, but which shifts over to each of the other major characters in part 3. This could be a good opportunity to try a paper on point of view, in this and the other works we’ve read. Does the POV work here? Why? Why would a writer choose this way over any other?

- Money plays a major role in this story– indeed, it drives everything that happens. But in the end, it was all for nothing: the money is gone. Consider the way that money influences action in some of the stories we’ve read. Is greed to blame for money’s power? Or is money merely the oil in the gears of our society? Are the writers attempting to critique our attraction to wealth?

- Here, Stark posits a kind of parallel universe to the “straight world”; an alternate society with its own rules, habits, and traditions. Describe it in detail, using examples from the text, and compare it to other subcultures in other stories– the island of the rich in “The Gutting Of Couffignal,” for example, or the pornography underworld in *The Big Sleep*.

- The criminals in this book interface with the straight world through the power of violation: Parker’s trashing of Brock’s apartment; Brock and Rosenstein’s invasion of the Saughertys’ house and Rosenstein’s taste for rape; the robbing of the bank; Parker’s manipulation of Joyce Langer. Analyze the role of boundaries and their violation in this and other stories from the class.

- Benny Weiss has two identities here: thief and “semi-retired putterer.” Parker goes by multiple names, and Saugherty meets his doom by thinking he can run with Uhl’s crowd. Many of the figures we’ve read about seem to live divided lives– their identities are confused or intentionally split; they suffer discomfort under the mantle of self. Write an essay about the fracturing of the self in crime fiction.