Out of Sight Short Guide

Out of Sight by Elmore Leonard

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The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

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BOOKRAGS

Contents

Characters

When we first meet Karen Sisco, the blonde deputy U.S. Marshal is wearing a $3,500 black Chanel suit with a short skirt. But Karen Sisco is not the fantasy figure that Jack Foley sees. She is not a romantic, either, as he is. Instead, she is a strong, no-nonsense female in the maledominated law enforcement industry. She can rack a pump-action shotgun or put down a sexual assault such as attempted by Moselle's brother Kenneth. She knows, when the crunch comes, not to give an inch. At one point Foley asks her why she ever became a federal marshal, and she tells him, "The idea of going after guys like you . . . appealed to me." She has not been lucky in love. She cannot seem to find "her type." Usually married men hit on her. She has come to peace with being alone and single and is not desperate to trade it for the dubious romances her career seems to offer her.

As she describes it, "Why settle for some cowboy cop who drank too much and cheated on his wife?" She is her own boss in romance. Once before she dated a bank robber, although she had not known his occupation at the time. She had rejected him as a potential lover before she discovered the truth about him. And when the time came, she "shot him" and brought him to justice.

With Karen, too, appearances can be deceptive. Karen is misunderstood and taken for granted by the FBI, by her coworkers, by some advertising executives at a cocktail lounge, and by the senior citizens at a Florida residence hotel.

When she must, she can withhold information from the FBI. At the midpoint in the novel, Karen sees the fugitive Foley at his ex-wife's hotel; she does not inform the other law enforcement officials. Yet single-handedly she captures Jose "Chino" Chirino, and then she parlays that capture into a position on the Task Force. Later she outmaneuvers FBI special agent Burdon during the Superbowl game into approving her trip to Detroit.

Jack Foley seems to be a gentleman thief, a bank robber whose heart is in the right place. Yet most often Foley is revealed as a man trapped in his life like a character trapped inside a movie script.

He is a forty-seven-year-old "celebrity hardtimer." For the last thirty years his career has been bank robber. Nine of those thirty years he has spent in prison.

"In stir, he's as cool as they come." He is serving his third prison stretch and is described by the authorities as "habitual, not violent." He is so well-adapted to prison life, he has his own rum smuggling operation. Yet he has no respect for his fellow prisoners; they are only "misfits and morons." Foley identifies more with "the boys of yesteryear," the bank robbers of the Depression era. Foley can rob banks with the ease that comes from a lifetime on the wrong side of the law. He does not know how many banks he has robbed, perhaps as many as two hundred.

But a certain malaise has come into his life; Foley points out that being a career bank robber has its downsides. "You know, after a while it gets to be the same old thing. You try to come up with ways to make it interesting." Foley is cunning enough to take advantage of other convicts' prison escape, yet he is strikingly inept outside the prison system. Often he disguises himself in foppish costumes. He senses how impoverished his life has become; he wants more, but is unsure what that might be.

But in Leonard's world, criminals are always criminals, and Foley, for all his differences with the other criminals the reader meets in the novel, is at heart one of them. His prison escape is made possible by his piggybacking off the six Cubans' escape plans. He succeeds because he betrays them; there is no honor among thieves. Foley robs a bank on his first day as a fugitive; he pretends that a perfect stranger is his accomplice. He does recognize that he has problems surviving in society. Foley ruefully admits to Buddy how he ended up in Glades Prison. After he robbed a bank, Foley was cut off in traffic; his heart filled with road rage, Foley chased the other driver and ended up smashing his getaway car.

"Only time I can ever remember losing my temper and I draw thirty to life."

Bank robbery has become boring; he is willing to raise the stakes by trying out home invasion. He has a con's bravado; Foley swears he will not go back to prison, even if "they put a gun on" him.

Every good character needs sidekicks and confidantes. Karen's father is hers.

Marshall Sisco (his real name) is a seventy year old who runs his own investigative services in Coral Gables; in the past he has been "mistaken for a short Walter Matthau." She goes to stay with him to convalesce from her ride in the trunk with a fugitive. Karen quizzes him for help tracking down Foley; "he knew how to find people." After her "time-out" with Foley in Detroit, she calls her father and reinforces her determination to capture—if she can— Jack Foley, "a guy who's wasted his entire life." Thus the reader sees Karen again as a strong, determined officer of the law. Yet her dad has his fatherly terms of endearment; he calls her "my little girl," "my darling little girl," and "the tough babe." All of these serve to soften Karen's image for the readers and prepare us for her final confrontation with Jack Foley.

Buddy (whose real name is Orren Edward Bragg) is Foley's sidekick and sounding board; they were partners in bank robberies in California and now Buddy has helped Foley escape from Glades Prison. Buddy helps the reader "hear" Foley thinking aloud and he asks those embarrassing questions for which Foley has no answer. Buddy has his eyes open, he tells Foley, then adds, "You want to sit down and have cocktails with a girl who tried to shoot you." But Buddy also represents loyalty. His sister Regina Mary is an ex-nun living in Los Angeles; she betrayed him, turned him in to the Los Angeles Police Department. Released from prison, Buddy still calls his sister once every week; that way she can still pray for his soul.

Leonard has two major villains in the novel, and each appears in only half the novel. Jose "Chino" Chirino and Maurice Miller are both former prize fighters.

Chino led the prison break from Glades.

Chino's appearances are all short and confined to the first half of the novel.

Because betrayal is the norm in Leonard's universe, Chino is used by Leonard to show how "marriages of convenience" ultimately fail. Chino betrays his prison lover "Lulu" to their mutual friend Santiago for the $10,000 reward on Lulu's head, then turns around and kills Santiago for that same reward money. He feels betrayed by Foley and so he stalks his exwife Adele in the hopes that Foley will visit her. Maurice Miller appears in the second half of the novel. Unlike Chino, Maurice has been out of prison for a while, but now he has slipped over the edge into homicidal lunacy. Formerly nicknamed "Snoopy," after the character in the Peanuts cartoon strip, Maurice has now become so criminally warped he prefers being called "Mad Dog" Miller.

Knowing who "ratted on" him, he leads a band of rapists and killers to the snitch's home, and three people are brutally massacred. But this vile act is just a warm-up for the novel's climactic home invasion and an animalistic feeding frenzy of violence.

While Karen Sisco is a strong woman character for the politically correct 1990s, Leonard does include two minor female characters as counterpoints, each of whom in life has settled for less, who get by, who never question their place in life.

The men they live with represent at best what these two women can live with.

Foley's ex-wife Adele Delisi lives in the South Beach section of Miami. Over forty and currently unemployed, she was a magician's assistant until the magician hired "a younger girl." She knows the secrets of the magician's trade and still keeps the faith. Her marriage could survive with Foley saying he was a card player, a gambler, a man who played the horses. "His idea of normal life, though," she explains to Karen, "was robbing banks." Still, she's on good enough terms with her ex to act as go-between with Buddy for Foley's prison break. Her room at the residence hotel serves as a crossroads for various characters to meet.

Foley spots Karen on surveillance when he comes to visit Adele. Karen is so stunned by his casual demeanor, she lets Foley walk off. Karen goes up to Adele's rooms to quiz her about her ex-husband's future plans; at the same time Chino, the escaped fugitive and murderer, visits Adele, and Karen arrests him. Moselle Miller is a survivor, another woman "who don't want to know what their men do."

Her life is anchored in the grocery money and marijuana that Maurice provides her from his criminal activities. Maurice tells her he plans on killing Foley so that she can collect the $10,000 reward on Foley's head. Only when he gives her no choice can she act, and then she betrays him without compunction. In her own way she too takes control over her own life.

Social Concerns

Elmore Leonard's thirty-fourth novel mates crime and romance novels in a text that consistently resists and confounds readers' expectations. Leonard's goal is to disabuse romantic notions.

Bank robber and convict Jack Foley escapes from Florida's Glades Prison by using the same tunnel six Cuban-born convicts have dug beneath the fence.

Foley follows them, pretending he is a prison guard chasing after them. Outside the prison, Foley meets up with his longtime partner in crime Buddy Braggs who has brought the getaway car. Coincidentally, Karen Sisco, a deputy U.S. marshal, has arrived at the prison at the same time to serve a summons. Foley and Buddy take her hostage and force her to join Foley hiding in the trunk of her car. A curious chemistry begins between the cop and the robber in the dark confining space. Soon Karen manages to escape from the two men. Later she joins the interagency task force set up to recapture the escaped convicts. Foley is almost caught by Karen and the other law enforcement officials when he visits his exwife Adele in Miami. He and Buddy then travel to Detroit to participate in the plans for a home invasion that another ex-convict Glenn Michaels has been planning for some time. Karen discovers those plans and takes it upon herself to travel to Detroit to track down their whereabouts. The turning point in the novel occurs after Foley walks in on Karen in the Westin hotel cocktail lounge; they talk as if they were strangers who chance to meet. In the midst of a blizzard Karen and Foley decide to have a romantic interlude, "a time-out" from their jobs, their roles, even their destinies.

But their "time-out" is soon over, and both return to their real lives. Against their own better judgment, Foley and Buddy join with Michaels and a band of more violent criminals for a climactic and murderous rampage in a millionaire's mansion in a Detroit suburb. Meanwhile, Karen tracks both men down. The climax brings Karen and Foley together for the last time.

Out of Sight is a mature look at a romance almost too improbable to imagine, even to these two people caught up in it.

Karen Sisco is a strong woman with few illusions. Jack Foley is a bank robber living out an obsolete mythology. Their relationship is at the core of the novel.

Uniformly Leonard refers to the characters as "Karen" and "Foley" through the novel, thus creating more sympathy for the Federal marshal than the bank robber.

For both Karen and Foley, their time together in the trunk of the getaway car merely made each wonder "if it would be different if they'd met in a bar. Like first date, getting to know one another." For Foley, "[H]e wasn't finished talking to her. He wanted to sit down with her in a nice place and talk like regular people."

Foley cannot stop thinking about Karen; for one thing, she is his "first girl in five months." He worries that he is acting like a schoolboy who has just discovered girls.

Foley also recognizes she is smarter than him, that she is always more alert. His feelings are not "in a sexual way." He remembers how her skin felt in the dark trunk, what her voice sounded like, how she said, when they left the trunk, "You win, Jack." How fashionable she always was.

Karen sees Foley as "laidback, confident." She likes his nerve, how he is willing to take high risks, and his sense of humor. Her pride is hurt by her ride in the trunk and by her inability to capture him then, but she is even more curious about the man himself. They both want "a time-out" called.

Leonard is concerned with behavior that happens out of sight, under cover of darkness, away from public eyes. He is concerned about appearance, deception, and betrayal, about self-discovery and acceptance. As in many of his other novels, his characters in Out of Sight are awkwardly self-conscious; they recognize that their behavior can be misconstrued.

They insist to others that they are not posing, not role-playing. In Out of Sight, Jack Foley and Karen Sisco have bumped into each other and are flirting with each other in a restaurant atop a Detroit hotel.

Outside, a snow storm rages. Outside, the world expects cops to be chasing robbers. But the two are here pretending to be "Gary" and "Celeste," made-up names to cover up that a bank robber and a federal marshal should not be flirting like this. Foley finds this masquerade difficult, and hesitates. "I don't think it works if we're somebody else. You know what I mean? Gary and Celeste. Jesus, what do they know about anything?" Karen tells him, "If we're not someone else then we're ourselves. But don't ask me where we're going or how it ends, okay? I've never played this before." When Foley answers her by saying, "'It's not a game,' she knew he meant it."

They end up in bed together, and the irony of cop bedding robber is fully explored by Leonard, albeit in oblique ways.

In her hotel suite Karen and Foley talk about Faye Dunaway (the star of the motion picture Bonnie and Clyde), about love and expectations and life's little surprises, and about John Dillinger. Foley tells her, "They say John Dillinger was a pretty nice guy." Sisco, still a federal Marshal points out, "He killed a police officer." And Foley counters by saying, "I hear he didn't mean to. The cop fell as Dillinger was aiming at his leg and got him through the heart." A rule of story telling is that questions the reader might raise must be answered in the course of the story. Foley tells Buddy that he and Sisco made love, that "it wasn't about getting laid." He reminds his accomplice that "you told me out on the highway it was too late, you know, to have a regular life. I knew that. I still wanted to know what might've happened if things were different." Buddy asks if Foley has found those answers. "Yeah, I did," Foley tells him, "not sounding too happy about it.

But what did that mean? He was disappointed by what he found? Or was sorry now he'd robbed all those banks?" The answers we discover don't always illuminate.

Later Foley finds himself part of a house invasion, encircled by psychopaths and murderers, a partner in a life-anddeath situation whose ending does not look promising. "Foley didn't answer [Buddy] because there was no way to explain what he felt, that these were the final scenes of his life playing out, that pretty soon it would be over and he was resigned to it happening. Here, not against the fence in some penitentiary. It was like if Clyde Barrow, driving along that country road in '34, knew he was going to run into all those Texas Rangers and there was nothing he could do about it. How did you explain that kind of feeling to anybody?"

Recognition of one's true worth, or the worth of another, does come through reflection. But "to reflect" can also be a property of inanimate objects, and Leonard uses mirrors, glass balls, cocktail glasses, plate glass windows, for his characters to reflect upon the issues of true worth and self-image. In the morning after Foley has left her bed, Karen remembers how her own reflection in the bathroom mirror of her hotel suite caused her to openly question the solidity of their relationship. In Leonard's world, frequently the mirror is an ironic tool to aid the reader in seeing. Other characters are more narcissistic; the mirror is to preen before, to pose, and they are blind to how others see them. While on the run Foley and Buddy stop at the Jewish Recycling Center to buy "new" clothes.

Foley had hoped his new clothes would make him look like "a businessman, some kind of serious executive." Instead, "What he looked like was a guy who'd just been released from prison in a movie made about twenty years ago." Still, Foley poses in front of the store mirror. "He half turned and cocked his hip in a pose: a photo of Jack Foley taken shortly after his daring prison escape. His mind flicked to a picture of Clyde Barrow, hat cocked down on one eye." Later on, a thief trying on stolen clothes can study his profile in a mirror and not "see" he is only a thief in stolen clothes; he thinks he looks cool. A criminal can see in a mirror other criminals giving him the evil eye; this "sight" gives him an edge. During a home invasion, a woman tries to hide from the invaders inside a mirrored closet; she is not successful; her deception is "seen through."

Movies are another tool in Leonard's world toward self-discovery, toward selfacceptance. Characters often talk about the movies they have seen. At times they pose as they have seen actors pose. Leonard loves life's little ironies; Karen and Foley both watch the same movie at the same time, but in different hotel rooms.

To Karen, the main characters remind her of Foley, "men trapped in their life," who cannot change the essential scripting of their lives. Foley, watching the same movie, can only try to figure out what the movie is all about. In the end of the novel, the mirror and the movie meet, and their clash inaugurates a great climactic blood-letting. "Foley saw it happening as he looked in the mirror and in a way it was like watching a movie."

Not all criminals are equal or alike.

Leonard does make a distinction within the spectrum of criminal behavior. Jack Foley stands out; he fancies himself different from other bank robbers and convicts; they are "misfits and morons."

Yet Leonard does not glorify criminals or their lives. For all their appeal, celebrity criminals are still criminals. As always, crime does not pay. Karen Sisco's final words to her father about Jack Foley, "He knew what he was doing . . . Nobody forced him to rob banks. You know the old saying, don't commit the crime if you can't do the time."

Techniques

Leonard takes the conventions of the traditional heist novel and combines them with the traditions of the romance.

The novel is also very cinematic; there are 96 quick scenes within the approximately 300 page novel. Dialogue and action carry the plot. There is minimal exposition, and even then in each scene the reader sees the action through a single character's point of view; Leonard's oeuvre has always insisted there be no authorial intrusion.

Leonard begins with the conventions of the crime genre, then confounds them.

As in much genre fiction for instance, many scenes in Out of Sight end with a question that demands a detailed answer.

Naturally the reader must read on to discover the answer to that question. This technique helps make some published novels into "page-turners." But Leonard does not work from an organized plot.

He likes to make the story up as he goes along. He begins with two characters and a situation. Once he begins, he completes each scene before moving on to the next.

As a consequence, much of the time characters are wondering what will happen next, where their actions and the actions of other characters—often unseen or unknown to them—will lead.

That tension is felt within the characters themselves. As Foley says to Karen, "How far do we go with this?" This technique rivets the reader to the page.

Another Leonard trademark is that his characters are often conscious of the irony of their situations. In a few instances in his long and productive career, Leonard's story line has drifted away from its core situation, and the reader almost becomes impatient. But Leonard is an adept storyteller, a professional whose skills have been honed by almost fifty years of commercial writing, and the reader here is never distracted or lost. In this novel, the ex-magician's assistant Adele tells Karen Sisco that how illusions are made should be kept secret. "It's the way they're done, that's what it's all about.

How isn't that interesting." Leonard is the real magician in Out of Sight.

Appearances can be deceptive in Out of Sight. For instance, Foley impersonates a prison guard to help his escape from the prison. When Buddy spots him exiting the escape tunnel, Foley stops, "taking his time now to put on a show, standing with his hands on his hips like an honest-toGod hack, that serious cap down on his eyes." Foley later impersonates a tourist in a beach outfit. On their way north Foley and Buddy will stop for secondhand clothes at a Jewish Recycling Center, and the two men will play dress-up.

Karen pretends she is Buddy's friend from Miami to his sister in Los Angeles to pump her for information on the fugitives' whereabouts. Because Foley piggybacked his escape on top of his, Chino sees Foley "as a liar pretending to be a friend." Later he calls and visits Foley's ex-wife Adele, pretending to be "Manuel the Mayishan" from Cuba.

Out of Sight plays with many types of deceptions, even those done by professional magicians, tricks like cutting a woman in half, or the girl in the cage who becomes a tiger. Most of the characters hide behind sunglasses, even at night, or in dimly lighted rooms, and even during a snowstorm.

Aware of such deceptions, Leonard's characters carefully measure each other.

Attitude is important, in Leonard's world.

Karen never underestimates Foley, "the con acting cool, nothing to lose." Meeting Maurice and his cronies at the Kronk Recreation Center in Detroit "took Foley back to the (prison) yard, sizing each other up, making judgments that could mean somebody's life. Foley didn't look at the big white guy, but kept staring at the Snoop he remembered as all show, had the moves, the weaves, the head fakes when he wasn't even near his opponent, doing that little jive skip and touching a glove to his head." Maurice translates "being cool" to being in control of the situation. And the world of Leonard, much like the world inside Kronk's gym, is a world of fighters, pretend fighters and posers. Also, men pose for themselves and for the women they want.

Adele notices how Glenn comes on to her, "posing," but then she realizes her ex-husband "posed, too, but was good at it."

Themes

Leonard believes our personal moral code is what authenticates each of us. At the same time he recognizes how contemporary behavior often finds its role models in popular legends and Hollywood movies and later expresses itself in role-playing, posturing, costumes and disguises, and pretending. Characters compare their behavior to long-dead gangsters and celluloid heroes. Leonard celebrates all this to some extent —Out of Sight is a funny novel, as Leonard's work is often funny—yet still he insists there comes a time when illusions must be set aside, that sooner or later the pretending must stop. These illusions are not, he suggests, the tools we can rely on to survive.

The popular legend Leonard borrows from most is the Depression era exploits of Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow.

While trapped with escaped convict Jack Foley in the trunk of the getaway car speeding down the freeway, Sisco asks Foley, "You must see yourself as some kind of desperado." Foley, surprised by her comment, ruminates, saying, "I never actually thought of myself that way." And then he adds, "Unless I did without knowing it. Like some of those boys of yesterday. Clyde Barrow—you ever see pictures of him, the way he wore his hat?

You could tell he had that don't-give-ashit air about him." In the darkness of the trunk, they spend the next few minutes (and miles) discussing the infamous shootout near Gibsland, Louisiana. Foley considers that "it wouldn't be a bad way to go, if you have to."

Posturing is important to all characters.

There are social games being played. To be cool is most important. Perhaps the greatest example of this is when Foley discovers Karen Sisco is in Detroit; a photograph of Karen taken outside the federal courthouse in Miami appears in the Detroit newspaper. "In the two-column photo Karen, in a tailored black suit, straight skirt, black bag hanging from her left shoulder, is holding a Remington pump-action shotgun, the butt of the stock resting on her cocked hip, the barrel extending above her on an angle, his right hand gripping the gun just above the trigger guard. Karen wears dark glasses and is looking past the camera, her lips slightly parted. The outline reads: LA FEMME KAREN".

Pretending is a theme throughout the novel. Initially two prison football teams are each pretending they're the Dallas Cowboys as they play each other, just as the Cowboys will be playing in the upcoming Superbowl. Role-playing is part and parcel, too. Car thief and ex-con Glenn Michaels is the link between the two old pro bank robbers, the Detroit psychopaths, and their target. He wears sunglasses even while watching movies.

As always in Leonard's novels, his characters have been profoundly influenced by Hollywood movies. They take time out to watch them, they explain their actions in light of certain movies, they pattern their behavior after these celluloid figures.

Sunlight is the best disinfectant, and what happens out of sight, where the light does not reach, is what concerns Leonard as a novelist. Out Of Sight posits a world divided between the light of reason and the darkness of animal desire.

A man and a woman "cuddled together in the trunk" of a getaway car can find themselves attracted to each other; there is no light, and the other four senses work overtime. Later Karen and Foley make love in the near darkness, barely illuminated by the light that comes in from other rooms. Foley is awed, seeing her face in lamplight or in the light from another room. But his world is the world of darkness, and he knows that all timeouts must end. When Karen wakes and finds Foley has left, the room is dark. She recognizes her loss. Often a sudden burst of light surprises the characters, illuminates their behavior, whether the light comes from the spotlights from the prison guards' towers, or the searchlight of police helicopters, or headlights of passing cars on the highway. Darkness also represents the criminal world. Prisoners escape into the darkness, are surprised by the spotlights from the guards' towers and by headlights of passing cars on the highway. They thought they were out of sight. Later in the novel boxers fight inside what used to be a movie theater. The lobby is well-lit, and the ring itself has its bright lights. But the real action of the novel—the decision to invade someone's home—happens out of sight of onlookers in the dark shadows.

By the same token, conversations inside cars are different whether the interior lights are on.

Adaptations

Directed by Stephen Soderbergh (Sex, Lies and Videotape), the 1998 film adaptation, also entitled Out of Sight, stars George Clooney as Jack Foley and Jennifer Lopez as Karen Sisco. Although it focuses on the star-crossed romance of Karen and Foley, the minor characters are finely developed, and its cinematography brings out the sleek moodiness and sophistication that enhance the story's own innate color. The film remains true to the novel except for the ending; in the novel the crime sequence that provides the climax is nihilistic, while the film ends with a warmer note.

Key Questions

One of the defining characteristics of most popular fiction is that within those particular stories society's most sacred values are brought out, examined for their worthiness and then tested by the situation the characters find themselves within. In the most successful stories, order is restored, and thus these traditional values are validated. These stories are said to have "happy endings"; society approves how the story concluded. In contemporary society fully half of all marriages end in divorce, while political and religious leaders are consistent in their call for a return to the traditional values which they say made America great. Is morality a coat that can be taken on or off according to the situation? Are these two finely-detailed characters moral, immoral, or amoral? A useful starting point for group discussions would be how Out Of Sight (and Leonard's previous novels) critiques our society's values and mores.

1. What are the usual readers' expectation in genre fiction?—In the crime novel? In romances? How does Leonard resist the formula(s)? Where does he validate them?

2. Leonard's characters are very conscious of their relative social positions. Is this reflective of our society? Are we too self-conscious? Does art imitate life?

3. Role-playing is an important theme in any Leonard novel. Who defines what is real and what is illusion? How successful is this role-play? How accurately do characters perceive each other? Which characters come to believe their roles are real? What is their fate? Where does free will enter?

4. How does Leonard represent the role of gender? According to the text, which sex is the weaker sex? Are men more romantic or more practical than women? Does romance offer an escape?

How do these characters mirror romances you may have encountered in daily life?

5. Examine the criminals. Are they stock characters? How does Leonard make them "more real?" How do they serve the plot, the action of the story?

Are all of Leonard's depictions from the lower income brackets of our society?

6. How are the various social and economic classes depicted? How are they judged by the story's outcome? Who are privileged above others?

7. Is Foley a throwback to an earlier age? Is he a romantic? Is he foolish or is his heart in the right place? Is Karen too cold-hearted, too cold-blooded? Under what circumstances could their romance flourish?

8. How does Leonard use a reader's five senses in the novel?

9. How does Leonard use clothes (including shoes) in the novel? What is Leonard suggesting? How do clothes define our place in society? Do we judge too critically how people dress?

10. Leonard believes that the author should completely efface himself from his writing. In each scene one character's point of view determines how that scene is written and presented. Is this effective?

Where is it most effective? Why this scene in particular?

Literary Precedents

William Shakespeare's As You Like It (c. 1599) perhaps predominates the structure of Out of Sight. Two very distinct people are isolated from daily life and thus are allowed to devote themselves to romance. The idyllic Forest of Arden becomes the postmodern Westin hotel in Detroit during a blizzard. Romance for Leonard, as for Shakespeare, is kept separate and distinct from "real life"— everyday routine. A romantic interlude for Karen Sisco and Jack Foley much resembles the romantic interlude between Rosalind and Orlando. Like Rosalind, Karen Sisco is the more responsible one of the two. She sees more clearly; she knows her duty and she will follow it.

Like Orlando, Foley is too much the romantic, often foolish in life choices.

That the Federal marshal and the bank robber could meet is a possibility; their lives do cross paths. But "cops and robbers" are by definition poles apart. Their occupations, their social positions, their personal beliefs, their perspectives on the world, their motivations and goals are completely at cross-purposes. That their "first encounter" should lead to a romantic interlude, a "time-out," is inherently incongruous, if not patently absurd. Their chosen professions should pose an impenetrable boundary between them.

Naturally, each is stressed to the limit by the pain of such improbable romance.

Yet they have a "time-out." For a few stolen hours they can live out a romantic fantasy. When the "time-out" is over, they must return to their chosen paths.

Like the movies they watch, their lives are scripted. Their romance cannot exist in the real world; it's too fragile, too illusionary. As in Shakespeare's great romantic comedy, each player in Out of Sight also has a confidante willing to listen and advise on matters of the heart. As Orlando has Jaques, Foley has Buddy, his longtime partner in crime; Buddy's role is to remind Foley about the simple facts of his thirty-odd years of criminal life. As Rosalind has Celia, Karen has her dad; his role is to both soften her character and to remind her of her responsibilities as an officer of the court. Lastly, as in Shakespeare's play, costume and disguise plays an important part in Leonard's novel.

Again, appearances are deceiving.

The classic European romance Tristan and Isolde also offers a literary precedent.

There, as in Out Of Sight, irony rules; the lovers are painfully self-conscious of their predicament, feel caught by social constraints they did not create, and wish for other fates. The American popular legend of Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow also is tapped. They were Depression-era bank robbers who for eighteen months crisscrossed the American Midwest. The 1952 movie High Noon is also a major influence; that final violent confrontation between good and evil is a staple of Leonard's work since his earliest westerns forty years ago. Jack Foley, like the movie marshal Will Kane, knows

the gunmen plan to kill him. But his personal code of honor cannot permit the home invasion to continue; he accepts a responsibility to stop Maurice Miller and his thugs from murdering two innocent people. Unlike Kane, Foley is still a career criminal; he's not going to bring them to justice by fighting fairly. Dashiell Hammett's The Maltese Falcon (1930; see separate entry) also echoes in Out Of Sight. There, the private detective Sam Spade must send Brigit O'Shaunessy to jail for the murder of his partner; that they were lovers cannot be allowed to influence his personal code of honor nor keep him from performing his sense of duty.

Related Titles

While Leonard has always featured strong, independent women characters, his writings truly began to reflect the changing role of women in his 1980 novel Gold Coast. But Leonard was still tentative and consequently his protagonist Karen DiCilia is not defined sharply enough for most readers to realize her potential.

Leonard was more successful with Carmen Colson in his 1989 novel Killshot (see separate entry), she is a rounder, more fully developed character than Karen DiCilia. Jackie Burke in his 1992 novel Rum Punch is also richly developed. Still, Karen Sisco is Leonard's most finely detailed portrait of contemporary women.

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