In his essay "The typology of detective fiction," Tzvetan Todorov discusses genre and then uses his discussion of genre to discuss literature and how genre creates literature. Chester Himes’ novel, *The Real Cool Killers*, appears to be a detective fiction novel and follows many of the rules of the suspense type given by Todorov, but not all. Therefore, following Todorov’s essay, Himes’ novel can be considered literature because it appears to follow the suspense kind of detective fiction but manages to transcend and expand upon the basic rules of its genre.

Todorov presents three kinds of detective fiction: whodunit, thriller, and suspense. He says that the whodunit kind presents two stories, while the thriller kind focuses more on one story, and the suspense kind seems to be a combination of both kinds. Todorov says “that between two such different forms there has developed a third, which combines their properties” referring to the whodunit and the thriller creating to make the suspense. He also says that a whodunit novel “contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation.” The two stories are seen in Himes’ novel, first with the death of the white man and then with Grave Digger’s investigation. Todorov says that in the thriller kind the novel focuses more on the second story or the investigation. Furthermore, he says that in the thriller the reader is left wondering if the main characters will live or die. These aspects of the thriller are seen with the death of the white man is only in the first chapter of the novel, leaving the majority of the novel to focus on the second story of the investigation. The reader wonders if Sugartit, Sheik, and Sunny will live or die and how the outcome might affect Grave Digger and Coffin Ed. Because Himes’ novel contains important aspects from both the whodunit and the thriller, the novel is perceived as a suspense detective fiction novel. Himes is able to keep the reader interested in who did commit the murder while also keeping the investigation story more enticing with the white man’s past and Grave Digger’s ways of getting information, and not by simply finding the killer. Todorov says that with the suspense novel “there is the curiosity to learn how past events are to be explained; and there is also suspense: what will happen to the main characters?” Himes is able to carry out both of these aspects by wanting the reader to look back and forward simultaneously. The reader constantly looks back at Grave Digger’s found evidence to try and figure who the killer is, while also looking forward while reading the story of Sheik and Sunny wanting to know what will happen. The investigation forces the reader to want to know who the killer is, while also begging for more information about the main characters.

While Himes’ novel follows some of Todorov’s main rules of the suspense detective fiction novel, it also differs in some ways. It is important for the suspense novel to contain the two stories of both the crime and the investigation; Himes’ novel seems to contain a third story. This third story is that of the gang, Real Cool Moslems, and their actions with Sunny. By adding the third story to the suspense novel Himes is expanding on the rules of the suspense kind of detective fiction or detective fiction in general. Furthermore, Todorov says that in a suspense novel the main characters must repeatedly risk their lives. While it is true that the main characters risk their lives in some ways, like Sunny leaving with the gang and Sheik taking Sugartit hostage, it is not a prominent part of the novel. While Grave Digger is investigating the murder he does not risk his life at all. There is no sense of constant action throughout the investigation that gives the idea that the main characters are in danger of death at any moment. Also, Todorov supplies two kinds of suspense detective fiction, one being where the detective loses his immunity and one being “the story of the suspect-as-detective.” In the novel, Grave Digger never comes across any way for him to lose his immunity because he is never really in constant danger.

Therefore, the novel should follow “the story of the suspect-as-detective” and it does in that Sunny is the suspected killer at first when he is not the killer, but Sunny never tries to find the real killer, he never becomes the detective to prove his innocence making the novel not follow “the story of the suspect-as-detective” form either. Therefore, Himes’ novel fits into neither of those categories, again expanding upon the rules of suspense detective fiction. Furthermore, while Todorov does not argue this, most detective fiction novels seem to be masculine in that the smartest and most powerful characters are male. However, in Himes’ novel, Sissy appears to be the smartest character. She tricks everyone from the beginning by her shooting the white man, and in the end she gets away with murder and even gets a husband. This makes it appear as though Himes’ novel has a more feminine side than masculine. Also, with most detective fiction novel it seems that the real killer is brought to justice. But in Himes’ novel that is not the case, Sissy never does go to jail and everyone believes that Sheik is the killer. Therefore, Himes’ novel does not follow the rules given by Todorov for suspense detective fiction or the general idea of what detective fiction is.

Todorov says that “Novels which have tried to do without both mystery and the milieu proper to the thriller… are too few to be considered a separate genre.” By applying this statement to the suspense novels instead of thrillers, Himes’ novel can be considered one of the few that cannot be considered a separate genre. Todorov implies that novels that transcend their original genre are literature, and if this is the case then Himes’ novel which transcends the suspense novel is literature. It is one of the few that cannot be separated easily into a genre because it does not follow the rules of the genre. However, this is not to say that every novel that does not follow the rules of genre is literature. The writer must expand on the rules and add to his or her novel in a way that means something. Himes’ does this when he adds the third story of the gang in to give his readers a better understanding of the society the novel works within. He makes Sissy more powerful to give shock value and show the power behind her name.

If Todorov wanted to make Himes’ novel into popular fiction, he would have to alter his rules of suspense detective fiction. First off Todorov would need to add a third story other than the crime and the story of the investigation, a story that somewhat intertwines with the investigation but is still separate and deals with the possible killers and suspects. Next, Todorov would need to take out the need for the main characters to be in constant danger, but still give the main characters some danger. He would need to separate the amount of times the characters risk their lives into the different categories of suspense that he provides. For example, he says that in the detective losing his immunity category, the main character constantly risks his life. Thus, Todorov would need to add a third category of suspense detective fiction, because Himes’ novel does not fit into either the loss of immunity category or “the story of the suspect-as-detective.” This third category would need to encompass Grave Digger’s, the detective’s, continuous immunity and investigation as well as Sunny’s, the suspect’s, innocence but no strong need or drive to prove that innocence. The category would also need to add in the amount the main characters risk their lives. He could say that in this category the main characters risk their lives but not to the extent in the other categories. However, Todorov does not include these things in his rules making Himes’ novel transcend the rules of genre and becoming literature.

Thus, while Himes’ novel follows some of Todorov’s rules of the suspense kind of detective fiction, it does not follow all rules. In some ways Himes expands on these rules and creates new ones. And as Todorov implies the novels that cannot fit into a specific genre should be considered literature. With this information and the basic rules of suspense detective fiction, it is decided that Himes’ novel is literature and not just popular genre, because it only appears to be suspense detective fiction and is not.