

ENG 90S: Detective Fiction and Film**Spring 2024****Wed & Fri 3:05-4:20****White 106****Instructor: Mike Kleynman****Contact: mk499@duke.edu****Office Hours: by appt.****ENG 90S: Detective Fiction and Film**

A bloodstain, a butler, a cryptic phone call—we know a detective story when we see it. But how do these tropes of detective fiction work? As that question lurks in the shadowy background, we'll spend this semester investigating our way through short stories, novels, and a few films.

We'll start with the most famous detectives: the impossible deductive skills of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Poe's Auguste Dupin, the borderline telepathic powers of Chesterton's Father Brown, the village intuition of Christie's Miss Marple. All the while, we'll track how these stories tell us that they are detective stories, and how that changes the way we read them.

We'll turn to the detective as imagined by noir films and "hard-boiled" fiction: in a trenchcoat, moodily smoking a cigarette in the rain. As we trace the rise, fall, and perpetual return of this sub-genre, we'll think about how this new kind of detective confronts new kinds of crime in new kinds of places.

Finally, we'll look at more recent examples: what's at stake with contemporary takes on the detective story? Do the old methods still work in movies like David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* or novels like Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*? Does the old detective make sense in a new time and place? Can we even think of these as detective stories at all?

SAKAI

Our class has a Sakai site which serves as the online home of our class. The class's necessary sources (supplemental texts, course syllabus, many of the films themselves, etc.) will be posted on this site.

You will also upload all your essays, which will be time-stamped, to the site.

TECHNOLOGY POLICY

This is a discussion-heavy course in which you'll spend most of class time speaking, asking questions, and listening to other students' comments. All of this only works when students are fully present, which is why laptop, tablet, etc. use is not permitted during class. The same, of course, goes for phones.

If you have a special reason or accommodation for technology use, please email me or speak to me after class.

ASSIGNMENTS

Response posts: This is a writing-based course, and so you'll have a short weekly writing assignment, due **by noon each Wednesday**.

These response papers should be between 250 and 400 words (so, a double-spaced page or so), and should be in response to the material for the week. These are designed to help you organize your thoughts ahead of class, as well as to give other students (and me) some insight into how you're thinking about the material. These are quite flexible, and you can do anything including:

- Making some observation about anything you found interesting or relevant in the texts as they pertain to our class. You can follow up points made in previous classes, connect the readings to your other interests, or build on others' observations.
- Close reading a scene from our book, story, or film. If you find something interesting going on with *how* a scene is written/shot, you might want to use your weekly paper to dig into how the text is working to create a particular effect, convey some theme or idea, or raise certain key questions.
- Comparing different texts, whether from class or not. Is there something about the story we're reading that week that calls to mind something else you'd read or watched? Feel free to explore it, thinking about what these similarities/differences mean.
- Writing a more personal response to the text. Is there something about the text that struck you, made you feel bad/good/disgusted/etc.? You can write a post interrogating what it is about the work that had that effect on you. Note: you can't just say that what you read was good/bad, you've really got to explore *how* and *why* it had that effect on you.

These are designed to help your grade: you get full credit for any post that is submitted on time and shows that you put in care and effort.

Over the course of the semester, you must submit a total of **ten posts**. How/when you do these is up to you, but submission of fewer than ten posts will negatively impact your participation grade.

Mid-term paper: This assignment will be 4-6 double-spaced pages in length and will ask you to close read one or more of our texts. You will get a formal assignment with prompts and guidelines later. **Due at noon of the day stated.**

Final paper: This assignment will ask you to craft a 7–8-page research essay that incorporates close readings of our texts with additional primary and secondary sources. You will get a formal assignment with prompts and guidelines later. **Note: you will have the opportunity to submit a rough draft to me for comments and guidance before the deadline. Due at noon of the day stated.**

GRADING

Participation: 25%

Mid-term paper: 25%

Final paper: 50%

ATTENDANCES AND ABSENCES

You're expected to come to—and participate in—every class. After one unexcused absence, your overall grade will be lowered by one-third of a letter grade for each subsequent unexcused absence (an A becomes an A-, an A- becomes a B+, etc.).

That being said: if you are feeling sick or something comes up that requires you to miss a class, just let me know ahead of time, and it won't be a problem.

If you have athletic, religious, or other commitments that will cause you to miss multiple classes, speak to me at the start of the semester.

These classes can only work if everyone reads/watches the assigned material before class. **If it becomes evident during class that you didn't do the reading, it will affect your participation grade significantly**—you cannot meaningfully participate in the discussion or the work without doing the reading.

OFFICE HOURS POLICY

I of course encourage you to meet with me for office hours as often as you like. Even if you just want to talk briefly about a text, ask questions about an assignment, or talk about writing in general, I'm always happy to meet.

In the interest of helping students over the initial hurdle of actually coming to office hours, I ask that **before February 21, you come to office hours at least once**. This is a mandatory component of the class. Beyond that, whether you come to OH or not is up to you.

LATE WORK

The usual rule applies here: one third of a letter grade off for each day a paper is late. In other words, what would have been an A becomes an A-, what would have been an A- becomes a B+, etc.

If you realize in advance you're going to struggle to turn in the midterm or final on time, please reach out 24 hours before the deadline so that we can arrange an extension.

Because posts are designed to structure our class discussion, they must be completed before the week's Wednesday class, no credit for late posts.

TEXTS

Required (in order of appearance):

1. [Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*](#)
 - a. [ISBN 979-8359421270](#)
2. [Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*](#)
 - a. ISBN 10: 978-0385493000, Vintage Press
3. [Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*](#)
 - a. [ISBN 006091307X, Perennial Editions](#)
4. [Walter Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*](#)

Suggested:

1. Agatha Christie, *The Thirteen Problems*
2. G. K. Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown*

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is, as you can likely guess, expressly prohibited at Duke. If there are any doubts about documentation standards, please be in touch with me directly before submitting your work. To quote the *Duke Community Standard in Practice*:

“Plagiarism” occurs when a student, with intent to deceive or with reckless disregard for proper scholarly procedures, presents any information, ideas, or phrasing of another as if they were his/ her own and/ or does not give appropriate credit to the original source. Proper scholarly procedures require that all quoted material be identified by quotation marks or indentation on the page, and the source of information and ideas, if from another, must be identified and be attributed to that source. Students are responsible for learning proper scholarly procedures.

The term “assignment” includes any work, required or volunteered, submitted for review, academic credit, and/ or disciplinary sanction.

All academic work undertaken by a student must be completed independently unless the faculty member or other responsible authority expressly authorizes collaboration with another.

Also, please note: AI-generated content falls under definition of plagiarism at Duke.

Full plagiarism policies can be found here: <https://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism>

DISABILITY AND ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

The following statement is taken from the Trinity College of Arts & Sciences website and represents the University’s policy on accommodations for disabilities.

Duke University is prepared to make reasonable academic adjustments and accommodations to allow students with documented disabilities full participation in the same programs and activities available to students without disabilities. Documentation is established through the Disability Management Service / Student Access Office, which is responsible for determining eligibility for accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act, informing a student’s academic dean and instructors of the need for accommodation, and providing guidelines for working with a student with a recognized disability. The Program Coordinator works with instructors and students to meet the documented need for accommodation.

If you are a student with a disability and need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to register with the Student Disability Access Office (SDAO) and provide them with documentation of your disability. SDAO will work with you to determine what accommodations are appropriate for your situation. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and disability accommodations cannot be provided until a Faculty Accommodation Letter has been given to me. Please contact SDAO for more information: sdao@duke.edu or <https://access.duke.edu/>

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS

The following statement represents the University’s policy on accommodations for religious observances:

Students are permitted by university policy to be absent from class to observe a religious

holiday. Accordingly, Trinity College of Arts & Sciences and the Pratt School of Engineering have established procedures to be followed by students for notifying their instructors of an absence necessitated by the observance of a religious holiday. Please submit requests for religious accommodations at the beginning of the semester so that we can work to make suitable arrangements well ahead of time. You can find the policy and relevant notification form here: <https://trinity.duke.edu/undergraduate/academic-policies/religious-holidays>

COURSE CALENDAR, SPRING 2024
(subject to change)

Prelude: introductions

F 1/12

- Syllabus, introductions.

Unit 1: The First Detectives, the Golden Age

W 1/17: The First Detective?

- Edgar Allan Poe, “The Man in the Crowd” (1840)
- --, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841)
- P. D. James, “What Are We Talking About and How Did It All Begin?” (2009)

F 1/19: “Ratiocination”

- Edgar Allan Poe, “The Purloined Letter” (1844)
- Arthur Conan Doyle, “A Scandal in Bohemia” (1891)

W 1/24: “The science of deduction”

- Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (Part 1) (1887)
- E. M. Forster on “Story” from *Aspects of the Novel* (1927)

F 1/26: More sleuthing

- Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (Part 2) (1887)
- E. M. Forster on “Plot” from *Aspects of the Novel* (1927)

W 1/31: Confessions

- S. S. Van Dyne’s 20 Rules of Detective Fiction (1928)
- G. K. Chesterton, selections from *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911)
 - --“The Blue Cross”
 - --“The Secret Garden”
 - --“The Invisible Man”
- Jorge Luis Borges, “The Labyrinths of the Detective Story” (1935)

F 2/2: Miss Marple and the “Cozy Mystery”

- Agatha Christie, selections from *The Thirteen Problems* (1932)
 - --“The Tuesday Night Club”
 - --“Death by Drowning”

W 2/7: Bad train voyages

- Sydney Lumet, *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974)
- Jorge Luis Borges, “The Nights of Goliadkin”

Unit 2: Hard-boiled fiction and film noir

F 2/9: A new method, a new detective, a new language

- Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder” (1950)
- --“Killer in the Rain” (1935)

W 2/14: From page to screen

- Howard Hawks, *The Big Sleep* (1946)
- Selections from Fredric Jameson’s *Raymond Chandler: Detections of Totality*

F 2/16

- **Mid-term paper workshops: Come with 2-3 pages ready to discuss.**

Sunday 2/18: Midterms due at noon.**W 2/21: High-brow/Low-brow**

- Edmund Wilson, “Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?”
- Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (1929) (Ch 1-6)

F/ 2/23:

- Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (Ch. 7-10)
- W. H. Auden, “The Guilty Vicarage”

W 2/28:

- Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (Ch. 11- 20)
- John Huston, *The Maltese Falcon* (1941)

F 3/1: “The great what’s-it” and the end of noir

- Robert Aldrich, *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955)
- Short critical piece, TBD.

W 3/6: Neo-noir, Neo-Marlowe

- Robert Altman, *The Long Goodbye* (1973)
- Selections from Fredric Jameson’s *Postmodernism*

Unit 3: Postmodern Detection**F 3/8: A Different Kind of Mystery**

- Jorge Luis Borges, “The Garden of Forking Paths” (1941)
- --, “Death and the Compass” (1942)
- --, “Ibn Hakkan al-Bokhari, Dead in His Labyrinth” (1949)

W 3/13: No class, Spring Break

F 3/15: No class, Spring Break

W 3/20: Paranoia, Conspiracy, the '60s

- Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)
- Selections from Richard Hofstadter's *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*

F 3/22: In the wrong era

- P. T. Anderson, *Inherent Vice* (2014)

W 3/27: "Doing as little as possible"

- Roman Polanski, *Chinatown* (1974)

Unit 4: Contemporary (90s and on)

F 3/29: "A man for his time and place"

- Coen Brothers, *The Big Lebowski* (1998)

W 4/3: "Who are you?"

- Kiyoshi Kurosawa, *Cure* (1997)

F 4/5:

- Walter Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990) Ch. 1 - 13

W 4/10:

- Walter Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990) Ch. 14 – end

F 4/12: "This is the girl"

- David Lynch, *Mulholland Drive* (2001)
- Short critical piece, TBD.

W 4/17: "A chilling real life detective story"

- David Fincher, *Zodiac* (2007)
- Selections from Robert Graysmith's *Zodiac* (1986)

F 4/19: Writing, Killing

- Lee Chang-dong, *Burning* (2018)

W 4/24: LDOC No Class

- **BUT:** I will be available for most of the day for Final Paper Conferences.

April 30: Final Papers due at noon.