

# Introduction to Crime Fiction

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Mondays and Thursdays, 10:20–11:40 a.m., in Frelinghuysen B1  
Professor Andrew Goldstone ([andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu](mailto:andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu))  
Office hours: TBD

This course introduces the study of mysteries and detective stories. Crime fiction has been the most popular of all fiction genres for at least the last century, while never fully attaining the honorific status of literature. To study crime fiction is thus not only to study how writers have imagined justice, the law, violence, and social order, but also to study the shifting boundaries between what is supposedly mere entertainment and what is supposedly literary art. Students will learn how to analyze a genre both in its own terms and in terms of social and historical developments. We will be doggedly serious about pulpy shoot-em-ups. We will study both genre landmarks and now-forgotten texts, ranging across American, British, and postcolonial Anglophone writers. Students are not expected to guess who did it before the end.

## LEARNING GOALS

1. Develop proficiency in using detailed analysis to support the interpretation of literary texts through case studies in crime fiction.
2. Reflect on central problems in the study of popular genre, including formula and innovation, cultural status, the role of the publishing industry, and the agency of individual readers.
3. Become familiar with the historical approach to cultural study through a broad transnational survey of crime fiction from the nineteenth century to the present.

This course also satisfies the Arts and Humanities (AHP) Core Curriculum goal: Analyze arts and/or literatures in themselves and in relation to specific histories, values, languages, cultures, and technologies.

## REQUIREMENTS

### PARTICIPATION (10%)

Attendance and active, thoughtful participation in discussion are required. Participation means coming to class prepared, with the reading in hand, and contributing constructively to discussion in every meeting. You aren't supposed to know all the answers in advance, but you are required to join in a communal effort to figure things out. Lateness, lack of preparation, and disruptive behavior will affect the participation mark.

From time to time, participation will be assessed with in-class writing (collected and graded pass-fail).

If you miss three classes without excuse, the maximum participation mark you can receive is 3.0; if you miss four, 2.0. Missing more than four meetings without an excuse will normally result in a failing grade for the course.

If you fall ill or miss class for a family emergency, please contact us as soon as possible; you can make up for an excused absence.

#### SHORT EXERCISES (10%)

Short graded homeworks, preparatory to paper-writing.

#### MIDTERM EXAM (20%)

In-class exam, short answers only.

#### PAPER 1 (30%)

1500-2000 words on a single text.

#### PAPER 2 (30%)

2000-2500 words on multiple texts from the course.

#### GRADING STANDARDS

Grades will be given on the four-point scale as specified [in the Undergraduate Catalog](#). In converting the final numerical score to a letter, the equivalents in the Catalog are taken as the maxima of intervals open on the left and closed on the right. Thus A corresponds to scores strictly greater than 3.5 and less than or equal to 4.0, B+ to scores greater than 3.0 and less than or equal to 3.5, B to scores greater than 2.5 and less than or equal to 3.0, and so on. There are no “minus” grades. The general standards for grades are as follows:

A range (3.5, 4.0]: Outstanding work, demonstrating thorough mastery of course materials and skills.

B range (2.5, 3.5]: Good work, demonstrating serious engagement with all aspects of the course but incomplete mastery of course materials and skills.

C range (1.0, 2.5]: Satisfactory work, meeting requirements but indicating significant problems mastering the course materials and skills.

D (0.5, 1.0]: Poor or minimally passing work, meeting the basic course requirements, but frequently unsatisfactory in several major areas.

F [0, 0.5]: Failure due to unmet course requirements or consistently unsatisfactory work.

The final grade will be based on a numerical score but is subject to my discretion. Unsatisfactory work in all areas of the course will result in an F even if the numerical score

corresponds to a passing grade. It is not possible to pass the course without turning in both papers and completing the midterm.

#### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students and instructors have a duty to each other and to our community to abide by norms of academic honesty and responsibility. To present something as your own original writing when it is not is plagiarism. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating are serious violations of trust. Academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will have severe consequences, in accordance with the University Policy on Academic Integrity and the Code of Student Conduct. For the University's academic integrity policies, please see [academicintegrity.rutgers.edu](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu).

#### STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

All reasonable accommodation will be given to students with disabilities. Students who may require accommodation should contact the Office of Disability Services ([ods.rutgers.edu](http://ods.rutgers.edu); 848-445-6800) and speak with me at the start of the semester.

#### SCHEDULE

##### THURSDAY, JANUARY 19.

- In class: assumptions and clues.

##### MONDAY, JANUARY 23.

- Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." For explanatory notes, refer to [www.eapoe.org/works/mabbott/tom2to43.htm](http://www.eapoe.org/works/mabbott/tom2to43.htm).

##### THURSDAY, JANUARY 26.

- Conan Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia."
- Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez."

##### MONDAY, JANUARY 30.

- Pirkis, "The Redhill Sisterhood."
- "Sergeant Ryan," "The Mysterious Highwayman"  
- (cf. *Ainslee's Magazine* [January 1901]).
- Smith, "The 'Snitch.'"

##### THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 2.

- Frow, *Genre*, 6–19, 134–41.
- Moretti, "The Slaughterhouse of Literature."

(FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3.)

- Exercise due: get a clue (one paragraph).

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6.

- Sayers, *Whose Body?*, chapters 1–4.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9.

- Sayers, complete.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13.

- Sayers, complete.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16.

- Daly, “Knights of the Open Palm.”
- Hammett, “Crooked Souls.”
- Hammett, “Suggestions to Detective Story Writers.”

(FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17.)

- Exercise due: motive (the academic kind).

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20.

- Hammett, “Crooked Souls,” continued.
- Todorov, “The Typology of Detective Fiction.”
- Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder.”

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23.

- Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, chaps. 1–5.

(FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24.)

- Paper 1 due.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27.

- Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, chaps. 1–15.

THURSDAY, MARCH 2.

- Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, complete.

MONDAY, MARCH 6.

- Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, continued.
- Borges, “Death and the Compass” (or read in Spanish, also on Canvas).

THURSDAY, MARCH 9.

- Midterm exam in class.

(SATURDAY, MARCH 11. SPRING RECESS.)

MONDAY, MARCH 20.

- Ngũgĩ, *Petals of Blood*, 1–79.
- Ngũgĩ, “Petals of Love.”

THURSDAY, MARCH 23.

- Ngũgĩ, *Petals of Blood*, 1–141.

MONDAY, MARCH 27.

- Ngũgĩ, *Petals of Blood*, 1–188.
- Carter, “Decolonization and Detective Fiction.”

THURSDAY, MARCH 30.

- Ngũgĩ, *Petals of Blood*, 1–270.

(FRIDAY, APRIL 1.)

- Exercise due: difficulties.

MONDAY, APRIL 3.

- Ngũgĩ, *Petals of Blood*, 1–308.
- Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind* (excerpt).

THURSDAY, APRIL 6.

- Ngũgĩ, *Petals of Blood*, complete.

MONDAY, APRIL 10.

- Ngũgĩ, *Petals of Blood*, continued.
- Boehmer, “The Master’s Dance to the Master’s Voice.”

THURSDAY, APRIL 13.

- Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, selection TBD.

(FRIDAY, APRIL 14.)

- Exercise due: Paper pre-writing.

MONDAY, APRIL 17.

- Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, selection TBD.

THURSDAY, APRIL 20.

- Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, selection TBD.

MONDAY, APRIL 24.

- Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, complete.

THURSDAY, APRIL 27.

- Swaminathan, *Murder in Seven Acts*, selections TBD.
- Swaminathan, "No Room of Mine."

MONDAY, MAY 1.

- Swaminathan, *Murder in Seven Acts*, selections TBD.

(DATE TBD.)

- Paper 2 due.

## REQUIRED BOOKS

ISBNs are included to help students ordering books online. The course texts are available via Barnes & Noble. Students who obtain the books in print format usually do better in the course.

Chandler, Raymond. *The Big Sleep*. New York: Vintage, 1992. ISBN: 9780394758282.

Mosley, Walter. *Devil in a Blue Dress*. New York: Washington Square, 1990. ISBN: 9781982150341.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Petals of Blood*. New York: Penguin, 1977. ISBN: 9780143039174.

Sayers, Dorothy L. *Whose Body?* Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2009. ISBN: 9780486473628. Purchase recommended but optional; I will provide a scan.

## OTHER READINGS

- Boehmer, Elleke. "The Master's Dance to the Master's Voice: Revolutionary Nationalism and the Representation of Women in the Writing of Ngugi wa Thiong'o." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 26, no. 1 (March 1991): 188–197. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002198949102600115>.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. "Death and the Compass." *New Mexico Quarterly* 24 (3 1954). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol24/iss3/3>.
- Carter, Steven R. "Decolonization and Detective Fiction: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*." *Clues* 8, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1987): 101–26.
- Chandler, Raymond. "The Simple Art of Murder." *Atlantic Monthly*, November 1944.
- Conan Doyle, Arthur. "A Scandal in Bohemia." Chap. 1 in *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. New York: Harper, 1892. HathiTrust, 2020. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044074319898>.
- . "The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez." In *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*. London: George Newnes, 1905. HathiTrust, 2022. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015086849463>.
- Daly, Carroll John. "Knights of the Open Palm." In *The Black Lizard Big Book of Black Mask Stories*, edited by Otto Penzler. June 1923. New York: Vintage, 2010.
- Frow, John. *Genre*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2015.
- Hammett, Dashiell. "Crooked Souls." In *Crime Stories & Other Writings*, 35–51. New York: Library of America, 2001. [http://www.loa.org/images/pdf/Hammett\\_Crooked\\_Souls.pdf](http://www.loa.org/images/pdf/Hammett_Crooked_Souls.pdf).
- . "Suggestions to Detective Story Writers." In *Crime Stories and Other Writings*, 914–16. New York: Library of America, 2001.
- Moretti, Franco. "The Slaughterhouse of Literature." *MLQ* 61, no. 1 (March 2000): 207–27. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/22852>.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Oxford: James Currey, 1986.
- . "Petals of Love." In *Writers in Politics: Essays*, 94–98. London: Heinemann, 1981.
- Pirkis, C.L. "The Redhill Sisterhood." *Ludgate Monthly* 4 (1893). <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/docview/3713106?accountid=13626>.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." In *Tales*, 116–50. New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845. HathiTrust, 2013. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nc01.ark:/13960/t2q53sx9p>.
- "Sergeant Ryan" [George C. Jenks]. "The Mysterious Highwayman." *Detective Story* 6, no. 1 (January 5, 1917): 77–86. <https://www.pulpmags.org/collections/pdf/dsm19170105.pdf>.
- Smith, Mert E. "The 'Snitch.'" *Detective Story* 6, no. 1 (January 5, 1917): 126–28. <https://www.pulpmags.org/collections/pdf/dsm19170105.pdf>.
- Swaminathan, Kalpana. *Murder in Seven Acts: Lalli Mysteries*. New Delhi: Speaker Tiger, 2018. E-book available via [Kobo](#) or [Amazon](#).
- . "No Room of Mine." *Open*, October 2, 2011. <https://openthemagazine.com/features/living/no-room-of-mine>.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. "The Typology of Detective Fiction." Chap. 3 in *Poetics of Prose*, translated by Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.