

Introduction to Crime Fiction

Mondays and Thursdays, 12:10–1:30 p.m., in Murray 210

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<https://andrewgoldstone.com/crime25>

Crime fiction has been the most popular of all fiction genres for the last hundred years. But why does anyone care which made-up person killed which other made-up person? These stories explore the difference between the law and justice, between how things should be and how things are, between deviance and normality. These are serious subjects, but crime fiction is rarely serious literature: our study will also be a study of the 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, but in at least one case, the culprit will be capitalism.

REQUIRED BOOKS

You must have these three texts in print for this course. They can be found at online booksellers like bookshop.org and Amazon; search using ISBNs. The course texts are also available via Barnes & Noble.

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.

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 popular culture studies, 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.

SCHEDULE

THURSDAY, JANUARY 23.

- In class: assumptions and clues.

MONDAY, JANUARY 27.

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

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30.

- Conan Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia."
- Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons."

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3.

- Pirkis, "The Redhill Sisterhood."

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6.

- Study *Detective Story Magazine*, January 5, 1917:
 - Read: Kurowski, "Detective Story Magazine" on pulpmags.org.
 - Read: Anthony, "Sinking Sands" and Smith, "The 'Snitch.'"
 - Make notes on: what different *kinds* of items are in the issue?
 - Make notes on: what do the contents tell you about readers?

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10.

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

(TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11.)

- Exercise due: get a clue.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13.

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

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17.

- Hammett, "[Crooked Souls](#)," continued.
- Todorov, "[The Typology of Detective Fiction](#)."

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20.

- Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, 3–54 (through chap. 10).
- Chandler, "[The Simple Art of Murder](#)."

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24.

- Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, 3–126 (through chap. 20).
- Exercise due: motive (the academic kind).

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27.

- Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, 3–169 (through chap. 25).

MONDAY, MARCH 3.

- Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, complete.
- McCann, *Gumshoe America*, 166–70.

(WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5.)

- Paper 1 due.

THURSDAY, MARCH 6.

- Hawkes, *The Big Sleep*. Watch on [Swank](#) via Canvas.

MONDAY, MARCH 10.

- Borges, "[Death and the Compass](#)" (or read in Spanish, also on Canvas).

THURSDAY, MARCH 13.

- Midterm exam in class.

(SATURDAY, MARCH 15. SPRING RECESS.)

MONDAY, MARCH 24.

- Ngūgĩ, *Petals of Blood*, 1–79.
- Ngūgĩ, "[Petals of Love](#)."

THURSDAY, MARCH 27.

- Ngũgĩ, *Petals of Blood*, 1–141 (all of Part One).

MONDAY, MARCH 31.

- Ngũgĩ, *Petals of Blood*, 1–188.

THURSDAY, APRIL 3.

- Ngũgĩ, *Petals of Blood*, 1–270.

MONDAY, APRIL 7.

- Ngũgĩ, *Petals of Blood*, 1–308.
- Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, 1–16, 20–27.

THURSDAY, APRIL 10.

- Ngũgĩ, *Petals of Blood*, complete.

MONDAY, APRIL 14.

- Ngũgĩ, *Petals of Blood*, continued.

THURSDAY, APRIL 17.

- Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, 134–59.
- Roos, “Re-Historicizing the Conflicted Figure of Woman.”
- Exercise due in class: response to critical reading.

MONDAY, APRIL 21.

- Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, chaps. 1–10.

THURSDAY, APRIL 24.

- Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, chaps. 1–20.

(FRIDAY, APRIL 25.)

- Exercise due: Paper 2 pre-writing.

MONDAY, APRIL 28.

- Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, complete.
- Optional: the film adaptation.

THURSDAY, MAY 1.

- Johnson, *Knives Out*. Watch on [Swank](#) via Canvas.

MONDAY, MAY 5.

- Johnson, *Knives Out*.

THURSDAY, MAY 8, 9:30 TO 11.

- Final exam (in person). Ninety minutes only.

(SUNDAY, MAY 11.)

- Paper 2 due.

GRADING

The final grade will be calculated as follows:

$$\text{grade} = 0.1(\text{participation}) + 0.1(\text{short assignments}) + 0.15(\text{midterm}) \\ + 0.20(\text{paper 1}) + 0.25(\text{paper 2}) + 0.2(\text{final})$$

Each grade is 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 used as follows:

$3.5 < \text{grade} \leq 4.0$	A
$3.0 < \text{grade} \leq 3.5$	B+
$2.5 < \text{grade} \leq 3.0$	B
$2.0 < \text{grade} \leq 2.5$	C+
$1.0 < \text{grade} \leq 2.0$	C
$0.5 < \text{grade} \leq 1.0$	D
$\text{grade} \leq 0.5$	F

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

Participation. 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.

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. Short writing exercises will be assigned occasionally as homework; there will also be occasional unannounced in-class writing exercises.

Midterm exam. At midterm, there will be an in-class short-answer exam.

Paper 1. The first paper (1500–2000 words) is an interpretive argument about a single text assigned in the course.

Paper 2. The second paper (2000–2500 words) is an interpretive argument bearing on multiple texts from the course.

Final exam. There will be an in-person final exam, short answer only, during exam period.

GRADING STANDARDS

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. For the purposes of this course, we will also consider any use of so-called “AI” tools for generating text

for assignments as a violation of academic integrity. Academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will have severe consequences, in accordance with the University Policy on Academic Integrity and the Code of Student Conduct. For details about the University's academic integrity policies, please see 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; 848-445-6800).

OTHER READINGS

- Anthony, Wilder. "Sinking Sands." *Detective Story* 6, no. 1 (January 5, 1917): 32–37. <https://www.pulpmags.org/collections/pdf/dsm19170105.pdf>.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. "Death and the Compass." *New Mexico Quarterly* 24 (3 1954). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol24/iss3/3>.
- Chandler, Raymond. "The Simple Art of Murder." *Atlantic Monthly*, November 1944.
- Conan Doyle, Arthur. "A Scandal in Bohemia." In *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. New York: Harper, 1892. HathiTrust, 2020. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044074319898>.
- . "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons." 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.
- Gikandi, Simon. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511554117>.
- 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.
- . "Suggestions to Detective Story Writers." In *Crime Stories and Other Writings*, 914–16. New York: Library of America, 2001.
- Hawkes, Howard, dir. *The Big Sleep*. Warner, 1946. <https://digitalcampus.swankmp.net/rutgers313400/watch/DA38BD55EAEC6807?referrer=direct>.
- Johnson, Rian, dir. *Knives Out*. Lionsgate, 2019. <https://digitalcampus.swankmp.net/rutgers313400/watch/8A99DC5C63B8854B?referrer=direct>.
- Kurowski, Travis. "Detective Story Magazine." The Pulp Magazines Project. <https://www.pulpmags.org/content/info/detective-story-magazine.html>.
- McCann, Sean. *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/lib/rutgers-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1167499>.
- 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 (April 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/nco1.ark:/13960/t2q53sx9p>.
- Roos, Bonnie. "Re-Historicizing the Conflicted Figure of Woman in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*." *Research in African Literatures* 33, no. 2 (2002): 154–70. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ral.2002.0056>.
- Smith, Mert E. "The 'Snitch.'" *Detective Story* 6, no. 1 (January 5, 1917): 126–28. <https://www.pulpmags.org/collections/pdf/dsm19170105.pdf>.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. "The Typology of Detective Fiction." Chap. 3 in *Poetics of Prose*, translated by Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.