

## American Crime Fiction

ENGL 4399.002 Fall 2014 Syllabus

Tues.-Thurs. 11:00-12:20 p.m. Preston 304

Prof. Neill Matheson

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office hours: Tues.-Thurs. 2:30-3:00 p.m., 5:00-6:00 p.m., and by appointment

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### Course Description:

This course traces the historical emergence and evolution of crime fiction in the U.S. from its earliest beginnings in the work of Charles Brockden Brown and Edgar Allan Poe, through influential twentieth-century detective fiction, including such sub-genres as hard-boiled, ending with some contemporary appropriations and revisions of the genre in literary and political fiction. We will explore the significance of crime fiction for the study of narrative, and the centrality of the detective figure, surprisingly durable and endlessly revised in American cultural history. We'll also consider the relationship of crime fiction to innovations in science and technology. From its beginnings, the crime genre tests the limits and powers of science, and of rationality itself (the mystery genre first emerged in the wake of the Enlightenment). We'll discuss the complex and shifting gender and racial politics of the genre throughout its history. The course ends with two quite different recent versions of detective fiction: Paul Auster's playful postmodern detective novel *City of Glass*, and Louise Erdrich's recent novel *The Round House*, which uses elements of the crime fiction genre to depict a crisis of sexual violence among American Indian women.

### Course texts:

Books:

Paul Auster, *City of Glass* (Penguin)

Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (Vintage)

Louise Erdrich, *The Round House* (Harper)

Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest* (Vintage)

Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (Norton)

Walter Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress* (Washington Square Press)

Edgar Allan Poe, *Selected Tales* (Oxford)

Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (Oxford)

Film:

*Miller's Crossing* (dir. Coen, 1990)

Note: This film will not be shown in class, so you will need to purchase or rent it. It must be viewed before the class in which it is discussed. It is available on dvd through Netflix, and can also be streamed on Amazon Instant Video, or purchased cheaply from Amazon.com or another vendor.

**Course Requirements:**

1. Short paper (4-6 pages).
2. Research paper (minimum 12 pages) formatted according to latest MLA standards.
3. Midterm and final exams.
4. Participation in class discussion. Oral presentation based on research for final paper.

**Note:** All major assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

**Course Grade:**

Short paper	20%
Midterm exam	20%
Final paper	30%
Final exam	20%
Participation (including presentation)	10%

**Attendance, Participation, Preparation:**

Student participation is an extremely important part of this course. The course will primarily be organized around discussion of the readings, rather than lectures; student interests will play a major role in shaping our discussions. I expect you to come to class having carefully read the texts for each day's meeting, prepared with questions, ideas, enthusiasms, or objections.

Because this course depends on your full involvement, regular attendance is also essential for its success. More than three absences will have a significant impact on your grade for the course. More than eight absences may result in failure for the course. Late arrivals (and early departures) are disruptive, and a pattern of tardiness will also affect your grade.

**Policy on Electronic Devices:**

Please turn off and stow away all cell phones, laptops, iPads, Kindles, and other electronic devices at the start of each class. Such digital devices are of course essential academic tools, but their potential to be distracting can outweigh their value in the classroom. Follow this link for an account of one influential recent study of "media multitasking" and distraction:  
<http://news.stanford.edu/news/2009/august24/multitask-research-study-082409.html>

**UTA Drop Policy:**

Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance. Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. Contact the Financial Aid Office for more information.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

Students should be able to:

- Demonstrate critical understanding of the specific authors and texts covered in the course, and identify connections synthetically between these texts.
- Demonstrate knowledge of major themes and issues relevant to American crime and detective fiction.
- Identify the characteristics of crime fiction as a genre; discuss its difference from and interconnections with other relevant literary genres; and provide an account of its literary history, including important shifts, developments, breaks with the past.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship of crime fiction to various significant historical and cultural contexts, including analyzing the relevance of important historical events or topics to specific literary works.
- Explain and make use of analytical and theoretical concepts and literary critical terminology covered in the course.
- Express ideas and perform analysis in clear, concise, logical, and persuasive writing.
- Express ideas clearly through relevant oral contributions to class discussion, and respond substantially to the ideas of other students.

**Academic Integrity:**

It is the philosophy of The University of Texas at Arlington that academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form. All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University. “Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts” (*Regents Rules and Regulations*).

The policy for this course is that any assignment found to involve plagiarism or other significant academic dishonesty will receive a zero. No rewrites are allowed for plagiarized papers. All incidents of academic dishonesty will be reported to the UTA Office of Student Conduct.

**Americans with Disabilities Act:**

The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide “reasonable accommodations” to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

Let me know if you have a disability, and we can work together to ensure that you are able to participate fully in the course.

### **Student Support Services Available:**

The University of Texas at Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. These resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals to resources for any reason, students may contact the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107 or visit [www.uta.edu/resources](http://www.uta.edu/resources) for more information.

### **Electronic Communication Policy:**

The University of Texas at Arlington has adopted the University “MavMail” address as the sole official means of communication with students. MavMail is used to remind students of important deadlines, advertise events and activities, and permit the University to conduct official transactions exclusively by electronic means. For example, important information concerning registration, financial aid, payment of bills, and graduation are now sent to students through the MavMail system. All students are assigned a MavMail account. *Students are responsible for checking their MavMail regularly.* Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/email/>. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, and it remains active even after they graduate from UT Arlington.

To obtain your NetID or for logon assistance, visit <https://webapps.uta.edu/oit/selfservice/>. If you are unable to resolve your issue from the Self-Service website, contact the Helpdesk at [helpdesk@uta.edu](mailto:helpdesk@uta.edu).

I will use your UTA email address for course handouts and announcements, as well as to contact you individually if necessary. So be sure to check your MavMail account frequently.

### **Course Schedule:**

**Note:** This schedule is provisional: I may make substitutions in readings or changes in the dates of assignments if necessary.

**Aug. 21** Introduction: American Crime Fiction

**Aug. 26** Charles Brockden Brown, “Somnambulism: A Fragment”; Karen Halttunen, “The Construction of Murder as Mystery” (e-text); Edgar Allan Poe, “Berenice,” “The Black Cat”

**Aug. 28** Poe, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Purloined Letter”; John Irwin, “Detective Fiction as High Art”

**Sept. 2** Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

**Sept. 4** *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

**Sept. 9** Hammett, *Red Harvest*; Moretti, from *Signs Taken for Wonders* (e-text)

**Sept. 11** *Red Harvest*

**Sept. 16** Film: *Miller's Crossing*

**Sept. 18** Chandler, *The Big Sleep*; Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder" (e-text)

**Sept. 23** *The Big Sleep*; **first paper due**

**Sept. 25** *The Big Sleep*; Jameson, "On Raymond Chandler" (e-text)

**Sept. 30** *The Big Sleep*, Zizek, "Two Ways to Avoid the Real of Desire" (e-text)

**Oct. 2** **Midterm**

**Oct. 7** Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

**Oct. 9** *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

**Oct. 14** *The Talented Mr. Ripley*; Foucault, "The Carceral" (e-text)

**Oct. 16** *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

**Oct. 21** Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*

**Oct. 23** *Devil in a Blue Dress*

**Oct. 28** *Devil in a Blue Dress*

**Oct. 30** Auster, *City of Glass*

**Oct. 29** **Last day to drop classes**

**Nov. 4** *City of Glass*

**Nov. 6** *City of Glass*

**Nov. 11** Erdrich, *The Round House*

**Nov. 13** *The Round House*

**Nov. 18** *The Round House*

**Nov. 20** *The Round House*; Erdrich interview "Burden of Justice"

**Nov. 25** Presentations

**Nov. 27** **Thanksgiving!**

**Dec. 2** Presentations; **final paper due**

**Final exam: Tuesday Dec. 9 11:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.** (in our usual classroom)