

Crime Fiction

Topics in Literature
ENGL 2303.005 Fall 2015 Syllabus
TR 12:30-1:50 p.m. Trimble 110
Prof. Neill Matheson
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Course Description:

The first half of this course focuses on the origins and evolution of crime fiction in the U.S. and England, beginning with Edgar Allan Poe, often credited with being the earliest writer of detective fiction. We will examine conventions, major themes, and important contexts for this genre, from the classical detective fiction of Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, to the hard-boiled crime fiction of Raymond Chandler and the dark innovations of Patricia Highsmith. We will explore changing ideas of policing, criminality, and evidence, and the centrality of the detective figure, surprisingly durable and endlessly revised in American cultural history. We will also consider the complex and shifting gender, race, and class politics of the genre throughout its history. From its first emergence in the wake of the Enlightenment, crime fiction tested the limits and powers of science and technology, and of reason itself, to make sense of what seems mysterious or incomprehensible, or to restore a threatened social order. In the course's second half, we will read some texts that push the genre beyond its conventional limits, blurring the boundaries between the mystery and science fiction, for example. If the detective is associated with rationality, order, and the law, these texts locate this figure within a world in which such values seem to be strongly challenged, no longer relevant, or out of place. In such a world, is the detective figure still viable?

Texts:

Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (Vintage)
Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Ballantine)
Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Broadview)
Patricia Highsmith, *Strangers on a Train* (Norton)
China Miéville, *The City & The City* (Random House)
Edgar Allan Poe, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Modern Library)
Ben Winters, *The Last Policeman* (Quirk)

Film:

Chinatown (1974; dir. Roman Polanski)

Note: This film will not be shown in class, so you will need to rent or purchase it. It must be viewed before the class in which it will be discussed. *Chinatown* is widely available. It can be streamed from Netflix or Amazon Instant Video, and probably can be rented at your local video store, if one still exists where you live.

Warning:

The nature of a crime fiction course means that some of the content that we will read about or watch may be disturbing. Course readings deal with subject matter and cultural issues that are potentially controversial or troubling, including of course crime itself, but also other forms of transgressive behavior, explicit and sometimes intimate violence, and ideas about sexuality and race, among other concerns. If you feel that you may be uncomfortable reading or talking about such matters, you should consider whether this is the right course for you.

Requirements:

1. Short paper (4-6 pages).
2. Final paper (6-10 pages). This paper will fulfill the sophomore literature requirement for a "Signature Assignment." Students must integrate material from secondary sources responsibly; support their argument with evidence from one or more primary literary texts; and engage with a relevant social, cultural, or political context. This paper must be formatted according to the latest MLA guidelines, with parenthetical citations and a works cited section. I will provide more information about the requirements for this assignment in a handout during the semester.
3. Midterm and final exams.
4. Reading quizzes. Because these quizzes are part of the daily work of the course, a measure of your preparation and participation, make-ups will not be offered if you miss class on the day a quiz is given.
5. Participation in class discussion and other class activities.

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

Grade:

Short paper	20%
Midterm exam	20%
Final paper	30%
Final exam	20%
Participation	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.

At The University of Texas at Arlington, taking attendance is not required. Rather, each faculty member is free to develop his or her own methods of evaluating students' academic performance, which includes establishing course-specific policies on attendance. As the instructor of this section, I have established the following policy: 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 put 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. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://www.uta.edu/aao/fao/>).

Course Objectives:

This course satisfies the University of Texas at Arlington core curriculum requirements in Language, Philosophy, and Culture. The required objectives of these courses are the development of students' critical thinking, communication skills, personal responsibility, and social responsibility. Many elements of this course foster development of these objectives, which are explicitly addressed in the “Signature Assignment” (see below). The Departmental guidelines for sophomore literature can be found by typing “sophomore literature” in the “Search UT Arlington” box on the University website:

<http://www.uta.edu/uta>.

Course Outcomes:

Students should be able to:

- Demonstrate understanding of the specific authors and texts covered in the course, and identify connections 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.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship of crime fiction to significant historical, cultural, and political contexts.
- Express ideas and perform analysis in clear, concise, logical, and persuasive writing, using sources responsibly.
- Express ideas clearly through relevant oral contributions to class discussion, and respond substantially to the ideas of other students.

Academic Integrity:

Students enrolled all UT Arlington courses are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.

I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.

UT Arlington faculty members may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents' Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

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.

Americans with Disabilities Act:

UT 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)*, *The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA)*, and *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act*. 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 disability. Students are responsible for providing the instructor with official notification in the form of a letter certified by the **Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD)**. Students experiencing a range of conditions (Physical, Learning, Chronic Health, Mental Health, and Sensory) that may cause diminished academic performance or other barriers to learning may seek services and/or accommodations by contacting:

The Office for Students with Disabilities, (OSD) www.uta.edu/disability or calling 817-272-3364.
Counseling and Psychological Services, (CAPS) www.uta.edu/caps/ or calling 817-272-3671.

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 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.

Title IX:

The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit uta.edu/eos. For information regarding Title IX, visit www.uta.edu/titleIX.

Student Feedback Survey:

At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as “lecture,” “seminar,” or “laboratory” shall be directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student’s feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington’s effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

Final Review Week:

A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

Emergency Exit Procedures:

Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit, which is located up the flight of stairs outside the classroom, and then to the left. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

Student Support Services Available:

UT 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. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to resources@uta.edu, or view the information at <http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/resources/index.php>

The English Writing Center (411LIBR):

Hours are 9 am to 8 pm Mondays-Thursdays, 9 am to 3 pm Fridays and Noon to 5 pm Saturdays and Sundays. Walk In **Quick Hits** sessions during all open hours Mon-Thurs. Register and make appointments online at <http://uta.mywconline.com>. Classroom Visits, Workshops, and advanced services for graduate students and faculty are also available. Please see www.uta.edu/owl for detailed information.

Electronic Communication Policy:

UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

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:

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

Aug. 27 Introduction

Sept. 1 Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"

Sept. 3 Poe, "The Purloined Letter"

Sept. 8 Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

Sept. 10 *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

Sept. 15 *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

Sept. 17 Chandler, *The Big Sleep*

Sept. 22 *The Big Sleep*

Sept. 24 *The Big Sleep*

Sept. 29 Highsmith, *Strangers on a Train*; **first paper due**

Oct. 1 *Strangers on a Train*

Oct. 6 *Strangers on a Train*

Oct. 8 *Strangers on a Train*

Oct. 13 *Strangers on a Train*

Oct. 15 Midterm

Oct. 20 Film: *Chinatown*

Oct. 22 Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

Oct. 27 *Androids*

Oct. 29 *Androids*

Nov. 3 Miéville, *The City & The City*

Nov. 5 *The City & The City*

Nov. 10 *The City & The City*

Nov. 12 *The City & The City*

Nov. 17 Winters, *The Last Policeman*

Nov. 19 *The Last Policeman*

Nov. 24 *The Last Policeman*

Nov. 26 **Thanksgiving; no class!**

Dec. 1 *The Last Policeman*

Dec. 3 *The Last Policeman*

Dec. 8 *The Last Policeman*; **final paper due**

Final exam: 11:00 – 1:30 p.m. Thursday Dec. 17 (in our usual classroom)