

Crime Fiction

Instructor: Sarah Liu

sarahliu@g.harvard.edu

Office: Barker 114



Tutorial Description:

Everybody loves crime fiction—W.H. Auden once said that “for me, as for many others, the reading of detective stories is an addiction like tobacco or alcohol.” This tutorial will explore a variety of works that fall under the umbrella of crime fiction, from 19th-century classics to contemporary works. Authors range from Edgar Allan Poe to Natsuo Kirino. Critical subtopics include structuralism, post-structuralism, postcolonialism, high vs. popular culture, adaptation, race, and gender.

Tutorial Goals:

- To write a 20–25-page research paper
 - o To develop a research question as well as a critical bibliography of methods and viewpoints around that question
 - o To put secondary criticism in conversation with your own ideas
- To gain an understanding of crime fiction and some of its subgenres
- To gain an understanding of certain critical works that have been formative for the discipline of English and literary studies
- To read better, write better, and think better

Assignments:

- Short Essay (10%, due by Week 4): 5-6 pages of extended close reading of a primary text or an application of a critical model to a literary text, followed by a short conference with me
- Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography (15%, due by Week 8): 2 page prospectus of your intended project, 8-10 source annotated bibliography
- Draft (15%, due by Week 12): partial (at least 5 pages) or full
- Final Paper (40%, due reading period): 20-25 pages on a work/author/topic from this class
- Participation (20%): come to class and be prepared for discussion of the readings, post a 100-200 word reading response to Canvas
- Conference Presentation (ungraded): deliver a 5-minute research paper to your peers at the Junior Tutorial conference

Required Texts:

(Secondary readings and shorter fiction will be made available on Canvas. Books marked with an asterisk are available for free on Project Gutenberg.)

Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone**

Agatha Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd**

Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*

Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*

Chester Himes, *Blind Man with a Pistol*

Natsuo Kirino, *Out*

Content Warning: Some of the course material is difficult and may be upsetting. Crime fiction often highlights not only individual acts of harm but also systemic injustices, many of which still persist today. Should you feel uncomfortable with the course material at any time, please talk to me.

Academic Honesty: Please do not plagiarize others or use AI. Remember to cite your sources.

Attendance: You are allowed one free absence, no explanations necessary, and subsequent absences without proper documentation will impact your grade. In the case of extenuating circumstances, please communicate with me in a timely manner.

Accommodations for students with disabilities: Harvard University values inclusive excellence and providing equal educational opportunities for all students. Our goal is to remove barriers for disabled students related to inaccessible elements of instruction or design in this course. If reasonable accommodations are necessary to provide access, please contact the Disability Access Office (DAO). Accommodations do not alter the fundamental requirements of the course and are not retroactive. Students should request accommodations as early as possible since they may take time to implement. Students should notify DAO at any time during the semester if adjustments to their communicated accommodation plan are needed.

Week 0: Introduction

- Get to know each other and some crime fiction-related terms!

Unit 1: Early Classics

Week 1: Genealogy

- “Susanna” from the additions to Daniel (539-333 BCE or early Hellenistic); Edgar Allan Poe, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841)
- Tzvetan Todorov, “The Typology of Detective Fiction” (1966); Maurizio Ascari, Chapter 2: “Counterhistories and Prehistories” (2020) from *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction*

Week 2: The Purloined Truth

- Edgar Allan Poe, “The Purloined Letter” (1844)
- Selections from Jacques Lacan, “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” (1972); selections from Jacques Derrida, “The Purveyor of Truth” (1975); selections from Barbara Johnson, “The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida” (1977)

Week 3: A Discourse on Detection

- Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” (1892) and “The Final Problem” (1893)
- G.K. Chesterton, “A Defence of Detective Stories” (1901); John A. Hodgson, “The Recoil of ‘The Speckled Band’: Detective Story and Detective Discourse” (1992)

Recommended reading: Jonathan Culler, “Fabula and Sjuzhet in the Analysis of Narrative: Some American Discussions” (1980)

Week 4: Evolving Aesthetics

- Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (1868) through the “First Period”
- T.S. Eliot, “Wilkie Collins and Dickens” (1927); Dorothy Sayers, introduction to *The Omnibus of Crime* (1931)

Week 5: Tackling Empire

- Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (1868) to the end
- Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988); Lillian Nayder, “Collins and Empire” (2006) from *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*

Unit 2: The Golden Age and Its Aftermath

Week 6: The Uses of Crime Fiction

- Agatha Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926)
- Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder” (1944); Edmund Wilson, “Why Do People Read Detective Stories?” (1944) and “Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?” (1945)

Week 7: Widener Library Research Workshop

- No readings this week
- Use this time to think about your project and/or read ahead!

Week 8: Realism and Justice

- Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (1939)
- W.H. Auden, “The Guilty Vicarage: Notes on the detective story, by an addict” (1948); selections from Fredric Jameson, *Raymond Chandler: The Detections of Totality* (2016)

prospectus & annotated bibliography due

Week 9: From Page to Screen

- Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (1929); watch the film adaptation (1941)
 - Selections from Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (1971)
- Recommended reading:* Virginia Woolf, “The Cinema” (1926)

Unit 3: Mid-20th Century and Beyond

Week 10: Race and Pathology

- Chester Himes, *Blind Man with a Pistol* (1969)
- Frantz Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” from *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952)

Recommended reading: James Sallis, “In America’s Black Heartland: The Achievement of Chester Himes” (1983)

Week 11: Feminist Noir

- Natsuo Kirino, *Out* (1997, trans. 2004) through “Dark Dreams”
- Elisabeth Bronfen, “Femme Fatale: Negotiations of Tragic Desire” (2004)

Week 12: Vigilantes

- Natsuo Kirino, *Out* (1997) to the end
- Alison Graham-Bertolini, introduction to *Vigilante Women in Contemporary American Fiction* (2011)

draft due

Week 13: Open Week

We will decide as a class what to read for this week!