

# English 208K: Detective Fiction

Spring Term, May - July, 2008  
Wed., 6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

S 3C .5  
Room 2011

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 4:00 – 5:30 p.m. or by appointment.

## Course Description

A study of the "detective novel", the "novel of crime", the "thriller", the "novel of intrigue", and of "espionage" with texts drawn from various time periods and national literatures. The course includes the examination of critical approaches to the form of detective fiction.

## Course Objectives

- To introduce students to British, American and Canadian examples of mystery and suspense, and study both classic and contemporary authors as they establish and elaborate the conventions of the eccentric amateur sleuth, the secret agent, the hard-boiled detective and the police inspector.
- To consider whether or not genre fiction possesses literary merit.
- To develop an understanding of the literary devices used to foster the reader's experience of mystery and suspense, including point of view, characterization, plot and setting.
- To explore the sociological pressures, historical context and forensic developments that prompted the popularity of certain kinds of mystery and suspense at particular times.
- To examine the psychological implications of the appeal to readers of mystery and suspense fiction.
- To analyse the similarities and differences between literary works of mystery and suspense and elaborations of those forms in classic and contemporary film and media.

## Texts

Giles Blunt	<i>Forty Words for Sorrow</i>
John Buchan	<i>The Thirty-Nine Steps</i>
James M. Cain	<i>Double Indemnity</i>
Agatha Christie	<i>Murder at the Vicarage</i>
Arthur Conan Doyle	<i>A Study in Scarlet [Chapters 1 &amp; 2]*</i> and <i>The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes</i>
Dashiell Hammett	<i>The Maltese Falcon</i>
John LeCarré	<i>The Spy Who Came In From The Cold</i>
Edgar Allan Poe	<i>Tales of Mystery and Imagination**</i>
Ruth Rendell	<i>A Judgement In Stone</i>

\*This work is in the public domain and is available online at  
[www.kidsnewsroom.org/elmer/infocentral/stories/scarlet.txt](http://www.kidsnewsroom.org/elmer/infocentral/stories/scarlet.txt)

\*\* These works are in the public domain and are available online at  
<http://www.eapoe.org/works/tales/morgued.htm> and at  
<http://www.eapoe.org/works/tales/plttrd.htm>

## Style Manual

For information about grammar, usage, syntax and documentation, the Department recommends Jane Aaron and Murray MacArthur, *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook*, Canadian Edition. Copies can be purchased at the UW bookstore or consulted at the reserve desk of the SJU Library.

## Readings and Class Schedule

### May 7: Introduction: “Crime Fiction: A Body of Literature”

Introduction to the Course; Defining mystery and Suspense; Historical & Literary Roots of the Genre

### May 14: The Beginning: “Man, You Should Have Seen Them Kicking Edgar Allan Poe.”

Texts: Edgar Allan Poe—from *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* read “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Purloined Letter”.

- Submit: “Expert Witness” selections.

### May 21: The Great Eccentric: “There’s No Police Like Holmes”

Texts: Arthur Conan Doyle—*A Study in Scarlet*: Chapters 1 & 2

From *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* read “A Scandal in Bohemia”, “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle” and “The Adventure of the Speckled Band.”

### May 28: The Thriller: “Saving the World”

Text: John Buchan—*The 39 Steps*

### June 4: The Golden Age: “Whodunit?”

Text: Agatha Christie—*Murder at the Vicarage*

### June 11: The Hard-Boiled Detective: “Trouble is My Business”

Text: Dashiell Hammett—*The Maltese Falcon*

- Essay topics submitted with draft thesis statement (optional)

### June 18: Mid-term examination

### June 25: Criminal Intent: “Chickens Come Home to Roost”

Text: James M. Cain—*Double Indemnity*

- Essay format review
- Submission of up to three pages of essay for comment (optional)

### July 2: The Spy: “An iron curtain has descended...”

Text: John LeCarré—*The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*

- Last Date For Essay Extension Requests

### July 9: Psychological Suspense: “Beyond This Point are Monsters”

Text: Ruth Rendell - *A Judgement In Stone*

- Essay Due

### July 16: The Police Procedural: “There’s No Holmes Like Police”

Text: Giles Blunt—*Forty Words for Sorrow*

- Essay Extensions Due

### July 23: The Tradition in Contemporary Media: “The Media Dunit”

- Course review.
- Essay questions for final exam distributed.

## Critical Approach

We will conduct our examination of mystery and suspense fiction as a forensic investigation.

- The text is the evidence.
- The author is the perpetrator.
- History is the scene of the crime.
- Expert witnesses will be called.
- Copycat perpetrators and partners-in-crime will be interrogated.
- The discerning reader is the judge.

Each text contains evidence of

- a certain kind of genre writing, whether of mystery or suspense;
- an elaboration of the themes of crime and detection, pursuit and discovery;
- a unique *modus operandi* perpetrated by an author upon the reader;
- reliable and unreliable testimony about the times in which it emerged and the social and historical tensions which underpin it; and,
- our human effort to address universal themes of guilt, innocence, truth and justice.

## Grading

**Participation:** Worth **10%** of final grade.

This will be based on participation in class by responding to and posing questions and engaging in discussion; and providing personal responses to the material.

Each student will also serve as an “expert witness” by signing up for **one** of a number of topics which will bear upon the discussion during the term and **one topic for the discussion of contemporary media at the final lecture**. (See attached sheet.) To perform this role, students must consult an encyclopaedia or website for basic information about the topic and provide brief answers from their seat when called upon by the instructor.

**Mid-term Examination:** Worth **20%** of the final grade.

Students will be required to write an in-class, ninety-minute mid-term exam on **Wednesday, June 18, 2008** covering readings, seminars and lecture material covered to that point. The exam will include

- brief identification questions on characters, themes, authors, critical views and texts covered in lectures or seminars that can be answered in one or two sentences;
- identification of the source and significance of selected quotations from primary texts and supporting material in one or two sentences;
- **one of three questions reviewing critical approaches** to the material requiring a paragraph response; and
- **a question requiring an essay of five to seven paragraphs** which argues a thesis and draws supporting evidence from two or three of the primary texts examined.

Format: Closed book. Books or notes may not be consulted though a dictionary may be.

**Research Essay:** Worth **40%** of the final grade.

Students will be required to hand in a 1500 - 2000 word essay (approx. 7 - 10 typed, double-spaced pages), on a topic selected from a list of suggested topics or a topic of choice with permission from the instructor. As this course is offered through the English Department, the essay will be marked for the quality of the literary analysis, the clarity of the writing and the adherence to correct form.

- Essays will be evaluated on the extent to which the thesis is clearly developed and persuasively supported.
- Since this is a research essay, essays must reference three or four critical or scholarly perspectives drawn from books or major journals.
- Footnotes or endnotes or works cited must conform to the MLA Stylesheet (an acceptably abbreviated form of which is in *The Little Brown Compact Handbook* noted above under “Style Sheet”.)

### Essay Timelines:

- Students may request a one-week extension of the essay deadline in writing without penalty until **July 2, 2008**.
- The essay is due in class on **Wednesday, July 9, 2008**.
- Essays granted extensions are due in class on **Wednesday, July 16, 2008**.
- Essays which are submitted after the approved due date **will be assessed a penalty of 2% per day** for every business day (Monday to Friday) that they are late.
- Late essays may be submitted in the mailboxes provided on the main level of the St. Jerome's Classroom building adjacent to the entrance to the Library.

### Final Examination: Worth 30% of the final grade.

A two-and-a-half hour final examination will be written in the official examination period and will cover the required readings and lecture material from the entire course. The exam will include

- brief identification questions on characters, themes, authors, critical views and texts covered in lectures or seminars that can be answered in one or two sentences;
- identification of the source and significance of selected quotations from primary texts and supporting material in one or two sentences;
- **two of five questions** reviewing critical approaches to the material requiring a paragraph response;
- and **two questions** requiring an essay of five to seven paragraphs which argues a thesis and draws supporting evidence from two or three of the primary texts examined.

Format: Closed book. Books or notes may not be consulted though a dictionary may be.

### Essay-Writing Assistance

Students are encouraged to seek out assistance in developing and researching a topic and writing an essay that is clear, concise and persuasive.

- Essay topics and draft thesis statements may be submitted for review in class on **Wednesday, June 11, 2008**.
- Students may submit up to three sample pages of the essay for review by the instructor on Wednesday, **June 25, 2008**.
- A review session dealing with correct format for footnotes, endnotes and bibliography will be held on **June 25, 2008**.
- A research workshop to assist in identifying secondary sources may be scheduled with the St. Jerome's University Librarian outside of class if class interest warrants.

## **Important information from the Dean of Arts**

### **Avoidance of Academic Offences**

All students registered in courses at the University of Waterloo and its Federated University and Affiliated Colleges are expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. Students who are unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who need help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating), or about “rules” for group work / collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, TA, academic advisor, the appropriate St. Jerome’s departmental Chair, or ultimately the Appeals Officer for St. Jerome’s University. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy #71, Student Academic Discipline, [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm). Students who believe that they have been wrongfully or unjustly penalized have the right to grieve in accord with Policy #70, Student Grievance, [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm).”

Please consult the Arts Faculty Web page, “**Avoiding Academic Offences**” ([http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic\\_responsibility.html](http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html)) for more information.

### **Dropping and Adding Courses**

Students may freely add courses for the first two weeks of term, and freely drop courses for the first three weeks. Courses dropped during weeks four to eight will automatically receive a grade of WD (withdraw); courses dropped from week nine onwards will automatically receive a grade of WF (withdraw, fail). The instructor does *not* have the authority to “drop” a student from a course. Students will automatically receive either WD or WF, unless they petition to the Examinations & Standings Committee.

### **Students with Disabilities**

The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term. OPD can be contacted at 888-4567 ext. 5082, TDD/TTY 888-4044.

### **Verification of Illness**

A medical certificate presented in support of an official petition for relief from normal academic requirements must provide all of the information requested on the “University of Waterloo Verification of Illness” form or it will not be accepted. This form can be obtained from Health Services or at [www.healthservices.uwaterloo.ca/Health\\_Services/VERIFICATION\\_OF\\_ILLNESS.html](http://www.healthservices.uwaterloo.ca/Health_Services/VERIFICATION_OF_ILLNESS.html). If a student has a test/examination deferred due to acceptable medical evidence, he/she normally will write the test/examination at a mutually convenient time, to be determined by the course instructor.