

Fall 2019 Course Descriptions

Instructor: Apostolos Vasilakis

Course: ENGL 394

Title: Studies in Genre: The American Detective Novel

Description: This course will focus on a selection of detective and crime novels written by American writers. Starting with Edgar Allan Poe we will trace the evolution of the genre (and its sub-categories) as a literary model from the 19th to the 21st century. Through our reading of specific stories written by Dashiell Hammett, Kenneth Fearing, and Walter Mosley (among others), we will examine the representation of the detective as an iconic figure within a specific political and social context, and our attraction for individuals who function outside the parameters of the law. We will look at the genre's stylistic pre-occupation with urban topography (what Chesterton calls the "chaos of unconscious forces"), how it re-defines itself through the representation of an often dark and crude modern life, and its reflection on social justice and truth. Further we will consider the detective novel not only as a popular cultural form, but also a social novel with a detective plot. At the end of the semester the students will be able to think about these stories not just as stories of pure entertainment and pleasure but also as stories that reflect on the social conditions that have produced them.

Proposed Readings: Edgar Allan Poe: "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"

Dashiell Hammett: The Maltese Falcon

Raymond Chandler: Farewell My Lovely

Sara Paretsky: Indemnity Only

Walter Mosley: Devil in a Blue Dress