ENGLISH 208K - DETECTIVE FICTION
Spring, 2001

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TEXTS:
Agatha Christie  The Murder of Roger Ackroyd
Arthur Conan Doyle  The Hound of the Baskervilles
Amanda Cross  The James Joyce Murder
Dashiel Hammett  The Maltese Falcon
P.D. James  Unnatural Causes
Sara Paretsky  Tunnel Vision
Ellis Peters  An Excellent Mystery
Edgar Allen Poe  Selected Tales
Eric Wright  Death of a Sunday Writer
L.R. Wright  The Suspect

SCHEDULE:
May  1  Introduction
      3 - 10  Poe and the origins of Detective Fiction
      15 - 17  Arthur Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes) - The Hound of the Baskervilles
      22 - 24  Agatha Christie (Hercule Poirot) - The Mystery of Roger Ackroyd
      29 - 31  The British country-house mystery and the early growth of the detective figure - amateurs and ‘professionals’.

Seminar Authors: Christie, Sayers, Marsh, Allingham

June  5 - 12  P.D. James (Adam Dalgliesh) - Unnatural Causes. The modern British detective novel.

Seminar Authors: Rendell, George, Dexter, Burley, Graham

      14 - 19  Dashiel Hammett (Sam Spade) - The Maltese Falcon. The American ‘private eye’, and the beginning of the American tradition.

      19  Mid-term exam
      21  Sara Paretsky (V.I. Warshawski) - Tunnel Vision. The female ‘hard-boiled private eye’.

      26 - 28  Amanda Cross (Kate Fansler) - The James Joyce Murder. The growth of the American tradition of the detective novel - amateurs and ‘professionals’

Seminar Authors: Grafton, Cornwell, Muller, Pickard, MacDonald

July  3 - 10  Ellis Peters (Brother Cadfael) - An Excellent Mystery. The growth of ‘specialty’ detective fiction.

Seminar Authors: Perry, Sedley, Tremayne, Tourney

      12  Essay Due

      12 - 26  Eric Wright (Lucy Trimble Brenner) - Death of a Sunday Writer.
              L.R. Wright (Karl Alberg) - The Suspect. Canadian detective fiction, amateurs and ‘professionals’.

Seminar Authors: Gordon, Bowen, Porter
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Detective Fiction looks at the beginnings, growth and significance of the genre, and, through a chronological/generic survey, explores the various authors, detective figures and larger issues of the fiction. We will also be looking at selected dramatic adaptations of some of the works studied.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Seminar:

Students will be required to give a 10 minute seminar presentation, with a partner, on an author and detective figure not assigned as required reading. Dates for the presentations are shown on the attached schedule and selections will be finalized during the second week of classes. Students will be required to hand in, on the presentation day, an annotated bibliography containing at least four (4) secondary sources and an outline of the presentation. A fuller description of the seminar requirements will be circulated with the schedule.

Worth 25% of the final grade.

Mid-term Examination:

Students will be required to write an in-class, mid-term exam on Tuesday, June 29/01, covering course material from Poe through Hammett.

Worth 15% of the final grade.

Essay:

Students will be required to hand in a 1500 word (approx. 5 - 7 typed, double-spaced pages) essay on a topic, either arising from the seminar presentation work, but individually prepared, 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 writing and for the quality of the literary analysis.

Worth 25% of the final grade.

Final Examination:

A three-hour final examination will be written in the official examination period and will cover the required readings and lecture material from the entire course.

Worth 35% of the final grade.
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Seminar Topics and Dates

Your seminar/presentation, conducted with a partner, should be 10 minutes in length and cover one of the following authors and his/her detective figure (you may also write in one of your choice). You might use the following areas to cover as a guideline for the shape of your presentation:

- a short biography of the author
- a list of the books concerned with the particular detective figure
- a short description of the detective figure
- some interesting features of the author’s style or plotting
- question and answer with the audience

You may use audio-visual material - i.e. short video clips, overheads, audio tapes. Please consult with me at least one class in advance to arrange for any extra equipment.

Dates are approximate. Please choose at least three (3) authors/detectives and indicate whether each is your first, second or third choice. Remember, you need not be familiar with the detective figure/author; the seminar will give you an opportunity to expand your experience of detective fiction, so try to choose someone you think you might be interested in.

**May 29, 31:** Agatha Christie (Miss Marple; Tommy & Tuppence); Dorothy L. Sayers (Lord Peter Wimsey); Ngaio Marsh (Roderick Alleyn); Marjorie Allingham (Albert Campion).

**June 7, 12:** Ruth Rendell (Inspector Wexford); Elizabeth George (Inspector Lynley); Colin Dexter (Inspector Morse); W. J. Burley (Superintendent Wycliffe); Caroline Graham (Inspector Barnaby).

**June 26, 28:** Sue Grafton (Kinsey Milhone); Patricia Cornwell (Kay Scarpetta); Marcia Muller (Sharon McCone); Nancy Pickard (Jenny Cain); John D. MacDonald (Travis McGee).

**July 5, 10:** Anne Perry (Thomas Pitt); Kate Sedley (Roger the Chapman); Peter Tremayne (Sister Fidelma); Leonard Tourney (Matthew Stock).

**July 17, 19:** Allison Gordon (Kate Henry); Gail Bowen (Joanne Kilbourn); Anna Porter (Judith Hayes).
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Essay Topics

Your essay topic may come from your seminar presentation, may be a topic of your own choosing (with permission) or may come from the list below. You may also choose to do a more ‘creative’ project. Please feel free to consult with either of us at any time concerning your essay topic choice.

1. Discuss the use of historical detail by Ellis Peters in the Cadfael series (or in one of the other ‘specialty’ authors listed, i.e. Perry, Sedley, etc.).

2. Discuss some modern adaptations of the “rules for detective fiction” arising out of the so-called ‘Golden Age’ of detective fiction. (You could use here Auden, Sayers . . .).

3. Discuss the debt of any of the writers on the course to Christie, Doyle or Poe.

4. Is Amanda Cross closer to the British tradition (Christie, Sayers, etc.) or the American P. I.. tradition? Discuss with reference to three works. (Cross, one British, one American).

5. Alisa Craig, Eric Wright and L.R. Wright are Canadian writers (Craig lives in the States and writes American detective novels under the name of Charlotte MacLeod). Discuss the similarities and differences in their respective portrayals of Canada.

6. Discuss the importance of one of the following to any of the novels on the course: setting, atmosphere, characterization, or plot construction (the puzzle).

7. Discuss the role of the narrator/sidekick in the works of Poe, Doyle and/or Christie. (Pick two).

8. Compare and contrast Hammett’s Sam Spade with a contemporary female private eye (e.g. Paretsky’s V. I. Warshawski).

9. Do a brief character sketch for a detective hero of your own creation, explaining how he or she is derivative/not derivative of Poe.

10. Explore the similarities and differences between the literary version and the film/television adaptation(s) of one of the course texts. For this topic, you might consider Doyle, Christie, James, Hammett or Peters. (Avoid merely summarizing differences in plot/narrative action here!)

11. Do a brief outline of an ‘ingenious idea,’ of your own creation, for a detective story.

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Essay Guidelines

Due: July 12, 2001
Length: 5 - 7 typed pages, double-spaced (approx. 1500 words)
Weight: 25% of the final grade

All students should carefully review the plagiarism guidelines handed out with the proposed topics. You must ensure that all primary and secondary sources, whether quoted, paraphrased, or otherwise influential, are properly documented according to the MLA system with page or line references as well as complete bibliographical information. This includes the assigned novels and/or Internet sources. Copies of both the MLA Handbook and the Little, Brown Handbook are available at the library for reference.

Essays should be handed in during class on July 12. Do not fax essays to the University and always keep a copy!! Extensions will be granted for a MAXIMUM OF SEVEN DAYS (July 17) - no explanation is required - but you must request the extension by NO LATER THAN JULY 5. Essays submitted after July 17 will only be accepted until the last class of the term (July 26), and will receive a grade (minus a 2% per day penalty, including weekends) but NO COMMENTS.

When writing your essay, concentrate on developing a strong opening paragraph which clearly identifies your argument and the way you intend to develop your paper. The thesis statement in the first paragraph is probably the most important part of the essay - leave yourself time to revise it, as necessary. Secondary sources, while not required, are often very helpful in developing your argument. Just a note of caution, though - don’t let your research overwhelm your paper or make your argument for you - use it sparingly to illustrate specific points. Please note that grammar and punctuation will be marked, so proofread carefully.

Please feel free to contact either of us to discuss your essay topic or specific problems you might encounter during the writing process. We will be happy to meet with you during office hours or by appointment, if necessary. Just telephone or e-mail one of us to arrange a convenient time.

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