

**Detective Fiction ENGLIT 0625 28682**

**Spring 2014**

**Dr. Ann Rea**

**MWF 11:00 - 11:50 Biddle 252**

**Syllabus and Course Description**

**anr12@pitt.edu**

**Office hours: MWF 12:00 – 1:00, and M 3:00-4:00**

**and by appointment**

**Office – Biddle 223C**

**Phone ext. 7166**

### **Required Texts**

Arthur Conan Doyle, *Sherlock Holmes: Complete Novels & Stories Vol. 1*, Publisher: Bantam

Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, Penguin

Dorothy Sayers, *Strong Poison*, Bourbon Street Books

P. D. James, *An Unsuitable Job For A Woman*, Touchstone

Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, Vintage

Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*, Vintage

Tony Hillerman, *Skinwalkers*, Harper

Kathleen George, *Taken*, Dell

Tana French, *In the Woods*, Penguin

You need to own copies of these texts and should aim to mark them up and make them your own, lived-in copies. Reluctantly I would ask you not to use Kindle or another reading device. After having a few students who have used them in my classes I have found that it is too difficult to find a specific page or passage quickly enough for them to work well in the classroom.

### **Course Description**

In this class we will follow the development of detective fiction from its earliest stories in English, those by Edgar Allan Poe, and the Victorian detective novelist, Wilkie Collins, and then Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. Detective stories have proved to be an amazingly versatile form, and have been seen as respectable reading for intellectuals even during the modernist period when highbrows believed that good literature had to be difficult. Although detective stories can allow a fairly passive reading-for-the-plot, they can also allow us to study them in a great deal more depth, and see them in their own historical contexts, as well as to look at the problems of philosophical thinking that they often explore. This occurs when the stories make us consider how much of our sensory perception we can trust, and whether the senses are adequate for letting us perceive the world accurately.

People were particularly concerned with this problem at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. When we move into the novels of the "Golden Age" of the detective story the novels become stylized. Many of you will have

a sense of what to expect from an Agatha Christie story. While she and Dorothy Sayers - our other example of a Golden Age novelist - share the fact that they write stories about a middle- and upper-class England that seems, perhaps, artificial in its enclosed-ness, they do nevertheless show us some of the preoccupations of people in their time. England in the nineteen thirties had to adjust to the arrival of refugees and immigrants from various parts of Europe after the First World War, as well as the decline of the aristocracy and the new power of the middle class. Women's roles in the society were changing, as were ideas about sexuality. We will see these concerns in Dorothy Sayers, but we will also consider the complaints that Raymond Chandler, an American, made about what he saw as the artificiality of the world described in the Golden Age novels, which allowed a somewhat formulaic story of the "it was the butler what done it," Country House murder story. Chandler took the detective story to the U.S., placed it in an anarchic context during Prohibition, and developed the "hard-boiled detective" of which his Philip Marlowe was the prototype. Dashiell Hammett adopted this type of novel with Sam Spade as a detective, and shows us the corruption and violence of American cities in the nineteen thirties. The English writer, P.D. James will take this in a new direction in late twentieth-century Britain, and we will read *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, published in 1977.

My difficulty was then to choose between the many great contemporary examples of detective fiction as the genre has become more literary and has developed into a form which writers use to describe the culture of a particular region or ethnic culture. I chose, in the end, *Skinwalkers*, by Tony Hillerman who writes about the Navajos of the "four corners" of the American southwest. I have also chosen the recent *Taken*, by Pitt Johnstown's own alumna Kathleen George, now on the faculty at Pitt Oakland. This novel takes place in Pittsburgh and describes the kidnap of the child of a Pittsburgh Pirates pitcher, before the Bucs were doing well. My new favorite detective novelist is the Irish writer, Tana French whose novels are set in Dublin, and whose detectives show amazing psychological complexity.

Throughout the course we will return to the question of the social class of the detective. The early texts show the detective to be a leisured - in other words aristocratic - man who outshines the plodding policeman. As the genre develops we begin to see police detectives who are from the middle class and actually work for their living, as well as women, and this changes the task that the detective performs. The novels raise many other issues of knowledge, including questions of identity, not just of the murder victim, but also the detective. The narratives scrutinize the methods that the detectives use, and experiment with methods of narration.

You can probably see that this class will entail a lot of reading. You will need to be prepared to spend a lot of time reading for this class. You must prepare for class by reading the assigned literature thoughtfully and completing the journal assignment for that day. This may take more time than you would at first anticipate, and you will sometimes need to spend time re-reading and thinking about what you read. A quick "run-through," or speed-read will not allow you to engage closely enough with the reading to understand it. I suggest that you begin your reading well in advance of class time. But these are great books, and some of them you will be unable to put down!

This is not a lecture class, but one where you will engage with ideas and conversation, which will require your **active** participation in a way in which your other

classes may not. A discussion class, especially a small one like this, can be lots of fun, but for it to function we need everyone to make the effort to be reflective about his or her part in it. If you tend to want to talk a lot you might need to check that you do not dominate the discussion. If you are shy and tend to leave the talking to others you might need to push yourself to speak. It is extremely important that we behave respectfully towards others in the discussions.

**There will be regular unannounced reading quizzes which will make an important contribution to your grade.**

**Class participation will contribute to your grade.**

### **Grades**

Your grade for this class will break down as follows:

Mid-term Examination - 20%

Paper One – 20%

Paper Two – 20%

Final Examination – 20%

Class Contribution and Quizzes - 20%

### **Classroom Procedures**

**Attendance:** A collaborative course like this necessitates a commitment to attendance. If you are not here, you will miss discussion, valuable writing experiences including the first drafts of papers, the process of collaborative revision of drafts, and instructions. Your grade will suffer if you miss class just because of the work you miss. **Your grade will be lowered by one whole point if you miss 3 classes. You also run the risk of earning a failing grade if you miss 4 classes.** You need to be punctual class, and to stay until class ends. Attendance means being in class from beginning to end and you must avoid scheduling appointments during class time.

**Please make sure that you turn off your cell phone and do not check for “text” messages. I will ask you to leave the class if I see you “texting,” and holding your phone on your lap will not fool me!**

### **Late Assignments**

In the academic and business world, assignments are due on the dates specified. By registering for this class, you have contracted to be in the academic world. Late papers will lose points.

**Plagiarism** is an extremely serious offence and will not be excused. Be sure that you see the distinction between peer revision in which you help each other to revise your work, and the kind of help with writing which involves someone else doing work for you. To present the language or ideas of others as if they are your own is plagiarism.

If you have a disability for which need to request accommodation you should contact the Learning Resource Center, G16, Owen Library, (814)269-7109 as early as possible in the

semester. The coordinator will verify your disability and define the necessary accommodation to be made.

Monday 6th January  
Introduction

**Wednesday 8th January**

Edgar Allan Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter"  
I will send you links to the electronic versions of these in your email. Please print the stories, read them (of course!) and bring them to class.

**Friday, 10<sup>th</sup> January**

Read Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* to page 47, end of Chapter V. Make sure you read The Prologue!

**Monday, 13<sup>h</sup> January**

Read Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* to page 105, end of Chapter XI, "First Period".

**Wednesday, 15<sup>th</sup> January**

Read Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* to page 156, end of Chapter XVIII, "First Period".

**Friday 17<sup>th</sup> January**

Read Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* to page 197, end of Chapter XXIII, "First Period"

**Monday, 20th January**

**Martin Luther King Day – NO CLASSES**

**Wednesday, 22nd January**

Read Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* to page 271, end of Miss Clack's narrative (pewh!)

**Friday, 24<sup>th</sup> January**

Read Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* to page 328, end of Chapter IV, "Second Period" in Franklin Blake's narrative

**Monday. 27<sup>th</sup> January**

Read Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* to page 430, end of Ezra Jennings's narrative

**Wednesday, 29<sup>th</sup> January**

Finish *The Moonstone*

**Friday, 31st January**

Read Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet Chapters 1 and 2* and "The Speckled Band," "The Man with the Twisted Lip"

**Monday, 3rd February**

Read Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia," "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle," "The Final Problem."

**Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> February**

Read Dorothy Sayers, *Strong Poison* to the end of Chapter V, page 61

**Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> February**

Read Dorothy Sayers, *Strong Poison* to the end of Chapter IX page 109

**Monday, 10<sup>th</sup> February**

Read Dorothy Sayers, *Strong Poison* to the end of Chapter XV page 178

**Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> February**

Read Dorothy Sayers, *Strong Poison* to the end of Chapter XVIII, page 223

**Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> February**

Finish *Strong Poison*

**Monday, 17<sup>th</sup> February**

**Mid-Term examination**

**Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> February**

Read Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder," (xerox)

Read Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* to page 39, end of Chapter 7

**Friday 21st February**

Read Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* to page 99, end of Chapter 16

**Monday, 24<sup>th</sup> February**

Read Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* to page 180, end of Chapter 26

**Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> February**

Finish *The Big Sleep*

**Friday, 28th February**

Read Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* to the end of Chapter 5 page 51

**Monday, 3rd March**

Read Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* to the end of Chapter 12, page 121

**Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> March**

Read Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* to the end of Chapter 16 page 160

**Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> March**

Finish *The Maltese Falcon*

**Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March - 16th March**  
**Spring Break**  
**No Classes**

**Monday, 17th March**  
**Paper One due in class**

Read P. D. James, *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* page numbers to be announced

**Wednesday, 19th March**

Read P. D. James, *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* page numbers to be announced

**Friday, 21st March**

Read P. D. James, *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* page numbers to be announced

**Monday, 24<sup>th</sup> March**

Read Tony Hillerman, *Skinwalkers* to page 119, end of Chapter 8

**Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> March**

Read Tony Hillerman, *Skinwalkers* to page 218, end of Chapter 16

**Friday, 28<sup>th</sup> March**

Finish *Skinwalkers*

**Monday 31st March**

Tana French, *In the Woods* to page 104 end of Chapter 6

**Wednesday, 2nd April**

Tana French, *In the Woods* to page 168, end of Chapter 9

**Friday, 4<sup>th</sup> April**

Tana French, *In the Woods* to page 225, end of Chapter 12

**Monday, 7<sup>th</sup> April**

Tana French, *In the Woods* to page 326, end of Chapter 19

**Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> April**

Finish *In the Woods*

**Friday, 11<sup>th</sup> April**

Kathleen George (UPJ alumna!!), *Taken* to page 83, end of Chapter 1

**Monday, 14<sup>th</sup> April**

Kathleen George, *Taken* to page 190, end of Chapter 2

**Wednesday, 16<sup>th</sup> April**

Kathleen George, *Taken* to page 271, end of Chapter 3

**Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> April**

**Finish *Taken***

**Review session to prepare for Final Examination**

**Final Examination during scheduled exam time**

**Paper Two due on day of exam.**