

English 90S-01: Detecting Genre: Cracking the Case of Mystery Fiction
Instructor: Hannah Rogers
Tuesday/Thursday 3:05-4:20
Allen 317
Office Hours by Appointment
Hannah.l.rogers@duke.edu

SYLLABUS: MYSTERY FICTION

COURSE DESCRIPTION

*"Come, Watson, come! ... The game is afoot."
-Sherlock Holmes, "The Adventure of the Abbey Grange"*

Sherlock Holmes, perhaps the world's most famous detective, views his mysteries as a "game" — connoting both a competitive sport and also a prey that must be hunted. The *whodunit* mystery, taking its modern form in the Victorian Era, captures this double meaning of playing "the game" — detectives both hunt for the perpetrator of the crime and, willingly or not, compete — against rivals, against time, against peril — to solve the puzzle. In fact, the *whodunit* has literally been realized as a game through activities such as murder mystery dinner parties and the famous *Clue*. But, if we've seen these puzzles over and over again, what about them remains engaging? Is not the writer, in some ways, competing against the ever-careful reader in an effort to trick, surprise, and delight?



In this course, we will begin by engaging the plot structure of the *whodunit* to examine how detective fiction has evolved from its recognized roots in Victorian England to the present. By paying close attention to elements that developed in early mysteries — such as the clue, detective, and suspect — we will develop a sense of what specifically characterizes the mystery genre. Oddly, however, since its conception, the mystery's structure and elements have not been isolated to one genre but used to kick-start the plot of others, such as noir and fantasy. What can we learn by considering, for example, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and Agatha Christie novels alongside *Harry Potter* or superheroes? What does it matter that mystery fiction's elements continually become reused in the most unlikely ways? And how does this interactive form affect us still as readers and scholars? As we "investigate" this genre, we may be able to solve the case of why we still find the mystery so sensational.

COURSE GOALS

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- 1) Identify the components of mystery fiction and analyze how they function within the genre
- 2) Demonstrate the ability to critically respond to texts for the purpose of in-class discussion and written assignments
- 3) Argue a claim using textual evidence and analysis in order to write a clear essay
- 4) Develop an original project (either creative or non-fiction) that acknowledges and builds upon the history of the mystery genre.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

This course is meant to be an introduction to the genre and development of mystery fiction, specifically focusing on the *whodunit*, and its major generic evolutions, themes, and structures. The reading and viewing in this course is roughly divided into two parts: the “birth” of the modern mystery, which began in the nineteenth century and reached its “golden age” in the early twentieth century, and the contemporary period, where writers have stretched the limits of and experimented with the conventions of genre. In examining these works of fiction, we will trace both how the genre of mystery fiction developed from the 1800s to the present day — what are staple elements of the genre; what themes reoccur or are reworked; can these radically different works from different times and places “speak” to each other? We will also visit Duke’s Special Collections to supplement these readings with exposure to the original versions of the works we are reading and artifacts related to the history of the genre that may be of interest when you develop your final project.

For every class period, with the exception of the visit to the special collections and final project presentation days, you will be assigned reading and/or viewing to do outside of class, and you will turn in an informal response to show your understanding of the work. In class, you may receive short lectures to put the day’s reading into context. However, the bulk of class time will be used for class discussion of the fiction and the occasional non-fiction selection or small-group activities. Because graded individual assignments are all based on writing, you will have time in class to do group activities and workshops that will help you successfully complete these assignments. I will use the short written responses to look at your writing to see what types of activities will best aid in developing writing skills.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

The Moonstone, ISBN-10: 0140434089

Murder on the Orient Express, ISBN-10: 0062073494

The Intuitionist, ISBN-10: 0385493002

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, ISBN-10: 0439708184

Batman: The Long Halloween, ISBN-10: 1563894696 (1999 edition)

Required viewings are accessible through Netflix and/or the Duke Library. Additional required and optional readings will be posted on the Sakai website.

If you cannot access the Sakai course site, please let me know promptly so we can resolve this issue.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance: You may miss two classes without penalty (including STINF and athletic absences), but missing more than two classes will result in a half-point drop in your final participation grade (B+ to B). If you miss class, it is your responsibility to makeup up all work and collect notes from a classmate. Consistent late arrival will also result in a drop to your participation grade. You may view Duke’s official absence policy here: <https://trinity.duke.edu/undergraduate/academicpolicies/class-attendance-and-missed-work>.

Accommodations: Students who may need special accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Student Disability Access Office (<http://www.access.duke.edu/students/index.php>) as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations can be implemented in a timely fashion. All

disabilities will be kept confidential. I will do my best to accommodate all other requests. Please speak to me as soon as possible if you need to request an accommodation.

Behavior: As this course will partially rely on in-class discussion, I expect you to come to class having read the material and prepared to participate. You should be respectful of all other members of the classroom. All readings should be brought to class in hardcopy (print materials that are posted on Sakai). Please **do not use laptops, tablets, cellphones, or other electronics** during class.

Deadlines: All due dates for major assignments are marked on the syllabus. All deadlines are considered final unless I make an alternation to accommodate the class. Work submitted late without an agreed extension will be automatically penalized a half-letter drop in your grade (e.g. B- to C). After a week from the deadline, the grade will then drop by a full grade further (e.g. C to D).

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AND PLAGIARISM

Academic writing is seldom self-contained with respect to its ideas and proof. Quoting and citing sources strengthens your writing by explicitly situating your argument within an ongoing conversation and body of evidence. In this course, we will learn and employ MLA-style citation. We will discuss quotation, paraphrase, and citation in class.

Recall the Duke Community Standard: 1. I will not lie, cheat, or steal in my academic endeavors, nor will I accept the actions of those who do; 2. I will conduct myself responsibly and honorably in all my activities as a Duke student. Please ask me if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism. See <https://plagiarism.duke.edu/>, <http://trinity.duke.edu/undergraduate/academic-policies/academic-integrity> and <http://integrity.duke.edu/> for more information on plagiarism policies and academic integrity.

Copying without attribution from the work of a classmate, from a printed text, or an electronic text weakens your integrity as a student and writer and prevents you from engaging properly with other scholars through writing. If I suspect anyone of plagiarism, I am *obligated* to report it to the Duke University Office of Student Conduct. Plagiarism can result in failure of the course and/or suspension from Duke University.

Be sure to cite all work that is not your own using MLA. You can find more information on how to properly cite within your papers here: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/02/>

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Participation: You should come to class on time with hardcopies of the day's reading assignments, ready to listen respectfully to short lectures on the material. You should also be prepared to participate in class discussions and collaborative learning exercises with your classmates, which will help you engage with the text and prepare you for written assignments. Because discussion is an important part of the class, please be respectful and help foster a productive environment.

Written Responses: You will write paragraph responses for the reading/viewing we are doing for the class period. **You will turn in these responses every day before class by 2 p.m. via Sakai Dropbox, with the exception of days where another writing assignment is due on the syllabus. (For example, when a paper is due, you will have no writing response.) I may read a selection of responses anonymously during class to kick-off discussion.** In the short term,

these responses will give you an idea of what you may contribute to the day's discussion. In the long term, these responses will offer you early feedback on your writing and allow you to explore ideas for the larger papers. These responses, in other words, are building blocks to the main course assignments.

Paper #1: Your first paper will be 4-5 pages and perform a close reading of the one of the early works of fiction we read for class. This means that, aside from the short story/novel, you will not consult outside sources. This paper will go through two required drafts: the first draft will be turned in for my review and the final draft will be a reworking of your original draft based on my comments.

Paper #2: Your second paper will be 5-6 pages and perform a close reading of one the later works of fiction we read/view for class. This paper will go through one required draft, on which you will be graded. If you would like to revise and resubmit, you will be able to meet with me and write another draft based on our meeting and my written comments.

Final Project Proposal: The final project proposal will be performed in-class and act as a way for you to get early feedback on your final project. Final project proposal presentations should last no more than 3-5 minutes. Because your final project will be tailored to your individual interests, we will discuss what would be an appropriate proposal for you to give to the class. At the end of the presentation, the class and I will give you feedback on your work and make suggestions for how you can take it further.

Final Project: Your final project will be designed by you in consultation with me. This project will build on either the critical or creative writing you have done previously in class. You may, for example, opt to write an 8-10 page research paper that uses close reading to construct an original argument. On the other hand, you may also design a creative project (a short story, a comic book, a short film, etc.) that allows you to explore what we discuss in class by crafting your own contribution to the mystery genre.

***Detailed rubrics for assignments will be posted to Sakai under the "Assignments" folder.**

GRADING

Your grade will be based on the following:

Participation: 15%

Writing Responses: 20%

Paper #1: 15%

Paper #2: 20%

Final Project Proposal: 5%

Final Project: 25%

Students must complete all major assignments, including all draft stages, to pass the course.

CONTACT

I will be available to answer question via email (hannah.l.rogers@duke.edu) throughout the semester. Please allow one business day for a response. I will also use email and Sakai to make important class announcements and to send reminders.

In the event that the class schedule needs to be changed, I will make the announcement in class and through email. You are responsible for all schedule changes. The schedule may be changed to accommodate the class (for example, we may encounter snow days that disrupt our deadlines). I will not discuss grades over email, but I will be happy to make an appointment to answer your questions.

SCHEDULE

January 12	Introduction (Please bring a copy of the syllabus to class)
January 17	“The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (Sakai)
January 19	<i>The Moonstone</i> , Prologue-105 (up to Chapter XII)
January 24	<i>The Moonstone</i> , 105-271
January 26	<i>The Moonstone</i> , 272-356 (up to Chapter VIII)
January 31	<i>The Moonstone</i> , 356-End
February 2	<i>The Study in Scarlet</i> (introduction to <i>Sherlock Holmes</i>), short excerpt “The Boscombe Valley Mystery” (Sakai)
February 7	Sherlock Holmes: “The Adventure of the Abbey Grange” Hercule Poirot: “The Adventure of the Western Star” (Sakai)
February 9	<i>Murder on the Orient Express: Part One</i>
February 10	Paper #1 Draft #1 Due by 5 p.m.
February 14	<i>Murder on the Orient Express: Part Two</i>
February 16	<i>Murder on the Orient Express: Part Three</i>
February 21	Archives Visit (Meeting Room TBD) Paper #1 Draft #2 Due in Class
February 23	“The Typology of Detective Fiction” (Sakai)
February 28	<i>LA Confidential</i> (Lilly) “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (Sakai)
March 2	<i>The Intuitionist</i> , 1-79
March 7	<i>The Intuitionist</i> , 79-189

March 9	<i>The Intuitionist</i> , 190-255
<i>Spring Break</i>	
March 21	<i>Batman: The Long Halloween</i> , Chapters 1-5
March 23	<i>Batman: The Long Halloween</i> , Chapters 6-10
March 28	<i>Batman: The Long Halloween</i> , Chapters 11-13 Paper #2 Due in Class
March 30	<i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</i> , Chapters 1-8
April 4	<i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</i> , Chapters 9-17
April 6	<i>Sherlock</i> , Season 1, Episode 1 (Netflix)
April 11	<i>Jane the Virgin</i> , Season 1, Episodes 1-2 (Netflix) Submit Final Project Selection by 8 p.m.
April 13	<i>Zootopia</i> (Lilly/Netflix), "Racisms without Racism" (Sakai)
April 14	Turn in Optional Paper #2 Revision by 5 p.m. (I will take it earlier if you have it, but this is the last day I can accept it.)
April 18	Final Project Proposal Presentations
April 20	Final Project Proposal Presentations
April 25	Conclusion/Game Day
In Lieu of Final Exam	<i>Final Project Due May 1 by 5 p.m.</i>