

**ENGL 235.10     Detective Fiction and Film Summer 2017 (6.5-7.7)     SYLLABUS**

**Prof Rebecca Boylan**

**Mon-Thurs 10:45 am-12:45 pm**

**Maguire 101**

**Office Hours – NN 321 ~ by appnt. T and W 1-2 pm and by appnt.**

**[boylanr@georgetown.edu](mailto:boylanr@georgetown.edu)**

**Books Available in GU Bookstore:**

*The Black Echo.* Michael Connelly. Grand Central Publishing/Hachette – 1991. 978-14555-50616

*The Trespasser.* Tana French. Viking, 2016. 978-0670026333

**Available via Gelardin Media Center (Lauinger Library) streaming or hard copy; Hulu, Netflix and Couchtuner Streaming:**

\**Hound of the Baskervilles*-streamed by Gelardin Media (Lauinger Lib)

\**Sherlock* – “The Hounds of Baskerville”- Season 2, episode 2 - Netflix streamed

\**L.A. Confidential*-streamed by Gelardin (Lauinger Lib)

\*BBC’s *Broadchurch* – Season 1 (Couchtuner Free Streaming)

\*Nordic Noir’s *The Bridge (Bron/Broen)* – 2011 – Season 1 (Hulu Free Streaming)

\*HBO’s *True Detective* – Season 1 (hard copy available on course reserve)

\*PBS *Murder on the Orient Express*

*Rear Window* – Alfred Hitchcock

**Course Description and Objectives:**

San Francisco detective novelist, Dashiell Hammett wryly observes in *The Thin Man*, “The problem with putting two and two together is that sometimes you get four, and sometimes you get twenty-two.” Only the detective, the investigator of knowledge en route to solving a crime, would judiciously perceive that the same evidence could add up in (at least) two entirely different ways. Not all detectives perform quite as Bogartian a wit as Hammett’s Sam Spade, but detectives of any time and place are a rather singular breed, empowered by a second sight often blind to their own natures. Some wield a gun, others yield to the girl (or guy), while still others fascinate with their “little gray cells” or exude a mystique almost as alluring as following the track of their gum shoes in pursuit of evil. Our own game’s afoot as from beneath the fedora, we enjoy clandestine encounters with several classic detective stories, ferreting out the origins of the detective persona and his or her story.

This summer we’ll explore the genre of detective fiction and film’s evolution according to the historical, cultural, and political realities directing the writers as well as framing the readers of these texts. We’ll begin our own sleuthing of detective narratives by viewing a recent film adaptation (2010) of detective fiction from the genre’s Golden Age: Agatha Christie’s *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), starring David Suchet as Hercule Poirot and film director Billy Wilder’s adaptation of Raymond Chandler’s American hardboiled noir, *Double Indemnity* (1944). Of course, detective fiction was born in the 19<sup>th</sup> C, penned by a variety of writers that we’ll very briefly hear soundbites from this summer as I weave them around and through brief lectures and discussion questions so that we might appreciate the historical

trajectory of a narrative intended both to jolt awake our consciousness (cognitive powers of logically connecting the dots of time, place, person, opportunity, and motivation) and conscience (what is the significance of these stories' keen reflection of their socio-political-cultural eras?). For example, is there a semblance of the Victorian Baker Street's ego maniac, Sherlock Holmes, in the fastidious rage of Modernity's Hercule Poirot? How does the hardboiled cynicism of Chandler born of post WWII angst and shame resurrect in *True Detective's* hurricane threatened, cult dependent Louisiana bayou? How does neo-noir's hardboiled cynicism oddly partnered with the quixotic or errant knight evident in *LA Confidential* resurrect in existential angst in *True Detective* or the haunting eye-opening gender switch-up

*True Detective's* Rust Cohle (Matthew McConaughey) sardonically charges the detectives interviewing him 17 years after it was assumed that he'd solved a horrendous stream of murders in Louisiana's Bayou, only to realize the killer had not been caught: "You want answers? Then start asking the right questions." And so here goes with those questions:

Questions directing both our class discussions and presentations include: What is the social – and literary – history of the detective? To what effect does the genre provoke awareness of borders between genders, gender and sexual identity, insiders and outsiders, and international perspectives and trust? While we are focusing this semester on western gumshoes, how significant is a cultural to appreciating the identity of the detective and his or her image and work? How does the detective reflect a societal response to crime and punishment? As detectives have become glamorized (as well as "realized") in fiction and film, what is the significance of the artist (and arts) to drawing public attention to the detective as both hero and human? How are human rights and the detective story comrades in arms? What are the intersections (why and to what effect) between historical violence and despair and detective fiction? How does the detective story provide a site for indignation, rage, and solace against reality (of injustice and prejudice especially) even as it re-enacts reality? What are the literary rules/expectations of the genre (and why)? Why is detective fiction FUN? provocative intercourse between sympathy and empathy, the memorable and atmospheric settings, those curious merges of melodrama, myth and the gothic with realism, the promise of an ending that resolves (through both amazing surprise and logic), and a re-enactment of a particular Age/Era/historical event of significant meaning/proportion, sympathy? What do we make of its plots that equally compel us toward the answer and the (next) question? How might we re-imagine the detective novel as site of imperialism? Why is the detective both a hero and a villain? Why is the criminal both a site of compassion and hatred? How does detective fiction allow us to re-explore race, ethnicity, and class? Why are we attracted to its textualities – hard edges and harsh perceptions (often confused with vague understanding), truly beautiful (glamorous) and ugly (gory) bodies and persona (the best and worst of humanity), spine-tingling fear and anxiety, memorable and atmospheric settings, curious merges of melodrama (including the gothic) with realism, promise of an ending that resolves (through both amazing surprise and logic), and re-enactment of a particular Age/Era/historical event of significant meaning/proportion – from a temporal/cultural distance? How do detective stories of the Victorian, Modern, and Contemporary eras uniquely glide us back into the Medieval quest for chivalry and the Renaissance's humanism conceived in the pursuit of Truth? All this in what we often write off as pulp and popular – the dime store crime novel. It's not so elementary, dear Watson!

We will ask these questions – and more – as we seek to close read this genre in ways through the micro lens of appreciating a medley of detective fiction from its earliest days to cogent examples written today. As the questions above demonstrate, we will accompany this slow reading with macro questions at the

heart of humanities that offer us opportunity to read these texts even more imaginatively beyond the stories, characters, and settings to understand their unique ways of perceiving and responding to cultural, social, and political realities. Our check points for such question asking and response will be noted in the student's loyal attendance and active participation in class discussions, in an individual presentation that includes directed questions to colleagues, and finally in a richly argumentative and dynamic research paper which allows the student the opportunity to pursue a question or series of questions in depth as to how this genre solves the truth of who we are and why justice should be a human concern and right.

### Course Requirements

Dynamic and consistent class attendance and participation: 35%

50-min power point presentation exploring ONE of the following: 15%

*The transition from detective novel to detective film and tv series;*

*Detective fiction as popular culture;*

*as brain exercise or logic game (including correspondence, coherence, pragmatic truth theories*

*as historical re-enactment;*

*as ethical catharsis in the individual or socio-political arena;*

*as gender bending in the study of detective partners;*

*as road trip/odyssey (from sleuth to gumshoe to train to automobile)*

*as cultural myth;*

*as noir*

One 12-page research paper required 50%

### Calendar Schedule of Readings:

\* I post reading/discussion questions on course blackboard that coordinate with every reading/viewing assignment in advance of our discussion of the text we are discussing. To that end, I expect that you will read these questions carefully and come to each discussion fully "armed" with thoughtful responses to these questions as well as your own additional observations, conundrums, and queries. Please note above the amount of credit I give to your class participation which is even more important during the summer intensive courses.

*To ensure that you all feel welcome and responsible for our class conversations, we will also begin every class with a 5-min reality bench-press which easily invites everyone into leadership and conversation.*

*Throughout our five weeks, I invite you to bring to our attention an item from contemporary real events (noting to us the source you referenced in receiving this "news") which reveals the dynamics of how and to what effect our society seeks, accrues, and communicates knowledge en route to exposing truth.*

*Unfortunately, there are plenty – too many – of these real stories directly related to alleged criminal activity. However, this exercise's objective is to provoke us to think like detectives ourselves as we explore how evidence is shaped, constructed, and read; how we turn forensics, if you will, into truth.*

*What assumptions are we relying on? What values? What prejudices? How important (or not) is primary research – seeing the thing for ourselves? What do we require of information-gatherers and interpreters in order to trust them? I think in this warm-up activity we will discover the proximity we allow*

*(sometimes way too readily) between information, truth, and justice. So on the class day or two in which*

*you bring in a reality check, keep your explanation to a minute or less. Pose a question, conundrum, skepticism about the particular gathering or reading of evidence you are briefly reporting on so that we might bounce off ideas in rapid fire for 3-4 minutes before jumping into discussion of the text and ideas on the table for that particular class.*

### Week 1

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| <b>M</b> | <b>6.5</b> | Course Introduction<br>Logic Game<br>Detective Story Read-a-Thon (all stories provided by prof; read medley of short narratives of the genre to discuss)       |
| <b>T</b> | <b>6.6</b> | Have viewed “The Hounds of Baskerville”( <i>Sherlock</i> , season 2, ep 2)<br><b>Guest Speaker: Allison Riley, PBS Production and Video on <i>Sherlock</i></b> |
| <b>W</b> | <b>6.7</b> | <i>In Class</i> - Sign Up for Presentation and Assign Date to each presentation<br>Have viewed <i>LA Confidential</i>  |
| <b>H</b> | <b>6.8</b> | Have viewed <i>Broadchurch</i> , episodes 1-3  |

### Week 2 (Student Presentations Begin and Continue through Week 4)

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|----------|-------------|---|
| <b>M</b> | <b>6.12</b> | Have viewed <i>Broadchurch</i> , episodes 4-8       |
| <b>T</b> | <b>6.13</b> | Have read <i>The Trespasser</i> , Prologue - Chap 3 |
| <b>W</b> | <b>6.14</b> | Have read <i>The Trespasser</i> , Chaps 4 - 7       |
| <b>H</b> | <b>6.15</b> | Have read <i>The Trespasser</i> , Chaps 8 - 11      |

### Week 3

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|----------|-------------|--|
| <b>M</b> | <b>6.19</b> | Have read <i>The Trespasser</i> , Chaps 12-18 (end)                                    |
| <b>T</b> | <b>6.20</b> | Have viewed <i>The Bridge</i> , episodes 1-3   |
| <b>W</b> | <b>6.21</b> | Have viewed <i>The Bridge</i> , episodes 4-6<br>FINAL PAPER WORKSHOP I: The Brainstorm |
| <b>H</b> | <b>6.22</b> | Have viewed <i>The Bridge</i> , episodes 7-10  |

### Week 4

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| <b>M</b> | <b>6.26</b> | Have read <i>The Black Echo</i> – Parts I and II      |
| <b>T</b> | <b>6.27</b> | Have read <i>The Black Echo</i> – Parts III-V         |
| <b>W</b> | <b>6.28</b> | Have read <i>The Black Echo</i> – Parts VI – Epilogue |
| <b>H</b> | <b>6.29</b> | Have viewed <i>True Detective</i> , episodes 1-3      |

**Week 5**

<b>M</b>	<b>7.3</b>	Have viewed <i>True Detective</i> , episodes 4-8
<b>T</b>	<b>7.4</b>	NO CLASS
<b>W</b>	<b>7.5</b>	Have viewed either <i>Murder on the Orient Express</i> – David Suchet as Poirot OR <i>Rear Window</i> – Alfred Hitchcock
<b>H</b>	<b>7.6</b>	FINAL PAPER WORKSHOP III: Reading Drafts – Sign up for time with prof

***FINAL PAPER IS DUE VIA E-MAIL BY JULY 11 MIDNIGHT EST. No late papers accepted.***