

Dr. Christopher A. Shinn
Georgetown University
MTWR 3:15pm – 5:15pm
Summer 2021

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PULP FICTION (ENGL 237-10)
3 CREDITS — CRN: 16938

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course examines the world of popular fiction, including the paraliterary genres of the detective novel, the western, the adventure story, true crime, the historical romance, fantasy and science fiction. Pulp fiction imagines the universe through a series of coded signs that we will interpret and observe closely in this course. These sign systems speak to broader economic and political realities and collective fears and fantasies, which are often submerged within a deep mythic structure. These texts also describe the hard-boiled world of the streets where survival depends upon the romance of toughness or returns us to the site of the pastoral through the nostalgia for the Old South and the Old West. Such stories assert beliefs about law and order, vigilantism and revenge, outlaw heroes and hard-boiled detectives. We will observe some key similarities between the western frontier hero and the detective in such classics as Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*, Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage* and Mickey Spillane's *I, the Jury*, among others. These works produce narratives in which men and women are created—and men and women are destroyed. They recreate history in order to locate the future in the past. The future becomes a cautionary tale about the world that we currently inhabit as we will see, for instance, in the science fiction writings of Ted Chiang. This course also asks how popular fiction has increasingly challenged the distinctions between high and low art and redefined the terms of culture itself. Using a cultural studies approach, we will be reading literary theory and criticism, listening to popular music and old time radio programs, screening film adaptations, watching documentaries and analyzing pulp fiction jackets.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:

- 1) relate the history of pulp fiction from its beginnings in early nineteenth-century dime novels to mass-produced paperbacks in the present day and explain reasons for the rise and proliferation of popular fiction globally in the modern era;
- 2) connect pulp fiction to canonical literary figures and their historic periods (e.g., James Fenimore Cooper and the western; Mark Twain and Edgar Allan Poe and detective fiction or the genre of horror; etc.) and explain why the pulp genre has been historically distinguished from the “classic” (How does pulp fiction become a classic, or can there be classics of pulp fiction?);
- 3) apply theoretical perspectives to interpret pulp fiction in terms of melodrama, race and romance, as well as discuss in detail such critical terms as “strategies of containment,” “deep structure,” “national romance,” “the culture industry,” “mass culture,” “symbolic

resolution,” “frontier ideology,” “collective fears and fantasies,” and “regeneration through violence”;

- 4) explain what key components go into the writing of pulp fiction, elements such as the plot-driven narrative, the cliff-hanger and dramatic catharsis; and be able to identify these features with concrete examples in literature;
- 5) analyze the meaning of the “popular” in terms of national myth, populism, mass culture, subculture, the “people,” and the politics of style.
- 6) give an in-depth overview of the genres of the detective novel, adventure story, science fiction, the romance, the spy thriller and the western, among others;
- 7) and demonstrate comprehension of how pulp fiction intersects with other popular mediums such as radio, film, television, music, and advertising.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Burroughs, Edgar Rice. *Tarzan of the Apes*. NY: New American Library, 2008.
ISBN: 9780451531025

Capote, Truman. *In Cold Blood*. NY: Random House, Inc., 1993.
ISBN: 9780679745587

Esquivel, Laura. *Like Water for Chocolate: A Novel in Monthly Installments with Recipes, Romances, and Home Remedies*. NY: Doubleday Books, 1992.
ISBN: 9780385420174

Grey, Zane. *Riders of the Purple Sage*. NY: Penguin, 1990.
ISBN: 9780140184402

Hammett, Dashiell. *Red Harvest*. NY: Random House, Inc., 1956.
ISBN: 9780679722618

Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. NY: Scholastic Inc., 1997.
ISBN: 9780590353427

Selected Readings on Canvas by Mickey Spillane, Frank Miller, Ted Chiang, Richard Slotkin, Doris Sommer, Janice Radway, René Girard, John le Carré and Lee Server, among others.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Students will be asked to attend each class meeting promptly and participate actively. Active participation requires the completion of the assigned readings before they are to be discussed in class and joining in small and larger group discussions on the course materials. Attendance and participation are required. The student is allowed three excused or unexcused absences, and further absences will be grounds to lower one’s grade. Should you have any difficulties meeting this requirement, you must see the instructor to insure that the problem can be addressed

immediately. The student's success depends upon the level of engagement that she or he brings to the course, and one's grade will reflect the quality and effort each student demonstrates throughout the semester. The student will be asked to write two papers (4-6 pages in length), give a class presentation and complete reading quizzes, take a midterm exam and a final examination (or write a final essay). You have the option of writing a final paper or taking a final examination. The total percentage of your grade will be determined according to the following scale:

- 10% class presentation
- 10% quizzes
- 15% midterm exam
- 20% first paper
- 20% second paper
- 25% final exam or final paper

GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM —The university community seeks to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity, and students should be apprised of the consequences of violating these honor codes. Should the student be found guilty of plagiarism or cheating, he or she will be given an automatic "F" for the course and will receive further university disciplinary action. For information on the university's policy on academic integrity, please consult the Academic Honor System, which can be found on the Georgetown University website:
<http://library.georgetown.edu/odyssey/plagiarism.htm>.

AMERICAN WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA): Georgetown University complies fully with the ADA requirements and encourages students with disabilities to receive the extra time and/or assistance needed to complete their courses. Please see the instructor about your specific needs and take advantage of the University Services for Students with Disabilities (see <http://ldss.georgetown.edu>).

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

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| Mon., June 7 th | Introduction to Pulp Fiction
Lee Server, "Introduction: Encyclopedia of Pulp Fiction Writers"
J. Randolph Cox, <i>The Dime Novel Companion</i> , "Dime Novel
Days: An Introduction and History" (Canvas) |
| Tues., June 8 th | Edgar Rice Burroughs, <i>Tarzan of the Apes</i> , pp. 1-107 |
| Wed., June 9 th | Edgar Rice Burroughs, <i>Tarzan of the Apes</i> , pp. 108-276
<u>Film Screening</u> : W. S. Van Dyke's <i>Tarzan, The Ape Man</i> (1932) |
| Thurs., June 10 th | Zane Grey's <i>Riders of the Purple Sage</i> , Ch. 1-12
Richard Slotkin, "The Significance of the Frontier Myth in
American History" from <i>Gunfighter Nation</i> (Canvas) |

- Mon., June 14th Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage*, Ch. 13-23
René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Canvas)
- Tues., June 15th Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest*, pp. 3-108
Larry Landrum, *American Mystery and Detective Novels*,
"Chronology" and "Historical Outline" (Canvas)
- Wed., June 16th Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest*, pp. 109-216
- Thurs., June 17th Mickey Spillane, *I, The Jury* (Canvas)
Selections from Frank Miller's *Sin City*
(Canvas)
- Mon., June 21st Film Screening: Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974)
FIRST ESSAY DUE
- Tues., June 22nd Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (Parts 1 & 2)
- Wed., June 23rd Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (Parts 3 & 4)
- Thurs., June 24th Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood*
Film Screening: Bennett Miller's *Capote* (2005)
- Mon., June 28th Special Topic: The International Spy Thriller
John le Carré's World of Espionage
Readings TBA
- Tues., June 29th Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, Ch. 1-6
Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance* (Canvas)
- Wed., June 30th Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, Ch. 7-12
Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions* (Canvas)
TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM DUE
- Thurs., July 1st Film Screening: Alfonso Arau, *Como agua para chocolate* (1992)
- Mon., July 5th Ted Chiang, "Understand," "Liking What You See: A Documentary"
(Canvas)
- Tues., July 6th J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, pp. 1-130
- Wed., July 7th J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, pp. 131-309
SECOND ESSAY DUE
- Thurs., July 8th End-of-Summer Party!

Final Thoughts on Pulp Fiction

Fri., July 9th

FINAL EXAM (Date & Location TBA)

Mon., July 12th

FINAL RESEARCH PAPERS DUE