

Spring 2015, BMA-AMED-400.33

The American Detective Story: Poe to the Postmoderns

Tue 15:30-17:00, Rm 356

Instructor: Enikő Bollobás

Office hrs: Thu 13-14 or by appointment; office: 312

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Description

This course investigates American mystery, detective, and crime fiction. We shall start with the classic tales of Poe, Hammett, and Chandler, and then extend our interest to various subgenres: serial killer fiction, feminist crime fiction, and postmodern metafictional (anti-)detective fiction.

Course requirements

Students are expected to

- (1) read the assigned texts,
- (2) write seven pieces of homework (plot summaries),
- (3) give one presentation of either a critical essay (MA students) or a literary text or film (BA students), and
- (4) do the final oral exam.

Readings

These are the assigned texts, seven altogether:

- Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (internet or pdf)
- Poe, "The Purloined Letter" (internet or pdf)
- Dashiell Hammett, "They Can Only Hang You Once" (internet or pdf)
- Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder" (internet or pdf)
- Thomas Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs* (find in libraries)
- Amanda Cross, "Professor Kate Fansler in *Once Upon a Time*" (pdf)
- Paul Auster, *City of Glass* (find in libraries)

You can download all the assignments and texts for presentations through this link:

https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B_EU3RfxXmojRG4yT2pLdUM0U2s&usp=sharing

Homework

Students are expected to write a short (plot) summary of each assigned text, seven altogether. You need to bring your summaries to class, on the day when we discuss the text. Should you be absent that day, you are expected to email me (to my university address: bollobas.eniko@btk.elte.hu) your homework by the time the class starts that day. Missed homework assignments will show in your grades.

Final exam

This will be a short oral exam covering all the readings and presentations.

Schedule of classes

February 10 **Orientation, introductory lecture**

February 17 **MYSTERY FICTION: Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"**
Homework: one page plot summary (not taken off the internet)

February 24 **Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (cont'd)**

Presentation (BA students):

- read and give plot summaries of Poe's "Hop-Frog" and "The System of Dr. Tarr and Mr. Fether"

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- read and give plot summary of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*

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March 3 **Poe, "The Purloined Letter"**

Homework: one page plot summary (not taken off the internet)

Presentation (BA student):

- read and give plot summaries of Poe's "William Wilson" and Babits's *Gólyakalifa (The Nightmare)*

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March 10 **Poe, "The Purloined Letter" (cont'd)**

Presentations (MA students):

- read and give critical summary of Lacan's "Seminar on the 'Purloined Letter'"

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- read and give critical summary of John T. Irwin, "Detective Fiction as High Art"

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March 17 **DETECTIVE FICTION**
Dashiell Hammett, "They Can Only Hang You Once"

Homework: one page plot summary (not taken off the internet)

Presentation (BA student): Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (1929); give critical summary of the novel; show film (1940; dir. John Huston; Humphrey Bogart as PI Sam Spade) (find book)

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March 24 **Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder"**

Homework: one page summary (not taken off the internet)

Presentation (BA student): Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (1939); give critical summary of the novel; analyze and show excerpts of the film (1946; dir. Howard Hawks; Humphrey Bogart as detective Marlowe) (find book)

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March 31 **student presentation of Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye***

Presentation (BA student):

give critical summary of the novel (1953); analyze and show excerpts of the film (1973; dir. Robert Altman; as Elliott Gould as Philip Marlowe) (find book)

novel:

film:

April 7 **NO CLASS (spring break)**

April 14 **SERIAL KILLER FICTION**

Thomas Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs* (find book)

Homework: one page plot summary (not taken off the internet)

Presentations (MA students):

- find critical articles on the novel as a serial killer narrative; you can also discuss the film, but your primary focus should be on the novel

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- discuss Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* as a serial killer narrative

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April 21 **FEMINIST CRIME FICTION**

Amanda Cross, "Professor Kate Fansler in *Once Upon a Time*" (pdf)

Homework: one page plot summary (not taken off the internet)

Presentations (BA students):

- Amanda Cross, *The James Joyce Murder* (1967) (find book)

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- Sue Grafton, *A Is for Alibi* (find book)

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Presentation (MA student):

- Lillian S. Robinson, "Postmurderism." *The Women's Review of Books*, 12, 10/11 (1995), 32. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4022181>

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April 28 **METAFICTIONAL DETECTIVE FICTION**

Paul Auster, *City of Glass* (find book)

Homework: one page plot summary (not taken off the internet)

Presentation (MA student):

- read and give critical summary of Alison Russell, "Deconstructing *The New York Trilogy*: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction." *Critique* 31, 2 (1990): 71-84.

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May 5 Paul Auster, *City of Glass* (cont'd)

Presentation (MA students):

- read and give critical summary of Steven E. Alford, "Spaced-out: Signification and Space in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*." *Contemporary Literature*, 36, 4 (1995), 613-632.

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- read and give critical summary of William Lavender and Paul Auster, "The Novel of Critical Engagement: Paul Auster's *City of Glass*." *Contemporary Literature* 34, 2 (1993), 219-239.

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May 12 FINAL ORAL EXAM

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LIST of possible presentation topics

For BA students:

- Poe's "Hop-Frog" and "The System of Dr. Tarr and Mr. Fether"
- Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*
- Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (novel and film)
- Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (novel and film)
- Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye* (novel and film)
- Amanda Cross, *The James Joyce Murder* (1967)
- Sue Grafton, *A Is for Alibi*

For MA students:

Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on the 'Purloined Letter'"

John T. Irwin, "Detective Fiction as High Art; Conserving a Sense of the Mysterious; Lacan, Derrida, and Johnson on 'The Purloined Letter'; Russell's Paradox." *The Mystery to a Solution—Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. 1-12.

critical presentation of Thomas Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs*

critical presentation of Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho*

Lillian S. Robinson, "Postmurderism." *The Women's Review of Books*, 12, 10/11 (1995), 32. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4022181>

Alison Russell, "Deconstructing *The New York Trilogy*: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction." *Critique* 31, 2 (1990): 71-84.

Steven E. Alford, "Spaced-out: Signification and Space in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*." *Contemporary Literature*, 36, 4 (1995), 613-632.

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