

ENGLISH 200: LITERARY STUDIES--CRIME FICTION

Professor Feaster, fall 2009, section B, MWF 10:10-11:00 a.m.

This course explores the literary, social, and cultural aspects of fiction that deals with murder and other serious criminal acts.

We will begin with the C. Auguste Dupin stories written by Edgar Allan Poe in the 1840s and a sampling of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes novels from the 1890s, read examples of the classic detective novel as practiced by Dorothy Sayers and Agatha Christie in the 1930s, and read novels and stories from the so-called "hard-boiled" school of detective fiction of the 1940s represented by Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammet. From there we will move to more recent developments—the feminist works of Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton, ethnic novels by Tony Hillerman and Chester Himes, and historical detective fiction by Ellis Peters and Robert Van Gulik or Peter Lovesey. Besides discussing the literary characteristics of crime fiction we will study and discuss the socio-cultural implications of this form of writing and speculate about why it seems to have had such wide popular appeal. We will watch at least one film version of a work we are reading.

Students will write several short papers on our readings, deliver an oral report on an outside assignment, and take a mid-term and a final examination.

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