English 132C. Cosmopolitan Crime: Global Detective Fiction

Instructor: Linda (Yang) Liu
Office hours: TBD
Time: TTh 10:30-11:50am
Location: 200-201

Course Description

Detective fiction is one of the most popular genres in the world. It is also, interestingly, one of the most international genres as well. The very first detective story, “Murders in the Rue Morgue” by Edgar Allan Poe, was written by an American, set in Paris, and featured an international cast of witnesses and suspects. In our increasingly globalized times, detective fictions have continued to incorporate multi-national elements in terms of foreign settings, international characters, and plots and themes that explore the nature of community, otherness, truth, morality, law, and justice across national and cultural borders.

In this course, we’ll look at a selection of detective stories, from the genre’s invention in the nineteenth century to today, and examine the ways in which detective fiction participates in the global imagination. How do these detective stories represent, resolve, or perhaps even deepen the tension between community and cultural difference? How do conceptions of cultural or racial “otherness” interact with questions of suspicion, guilt or innocence? How far does detective fiction fulfill a cosmopolitan ideal of transnational justice and equality, and in what ways does it fall short of imagining foreignness as anything but “other”?

As we proceed, we’ll consider the conventions of the detective genre and how they adapt to different transnational issues. In the first half of the quarter, we’ll study the early development of the detective story into its “classic” phase in the context of immigration and European imperialism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In the second half, we’ll turn to twenty-first century detective fictions that deal with the concerns of our contemporary globalized world: identity politics, multiculturalism, the aftermath of genocide, and international terrorism.

Expectations

This course is a seminar. That means that classes will be primarily discussion-based, which means, in turn, that your contributions will be crucial to how much we learn. All participants, including me, will be expected to engage with the material and with each other thoughtfully, generously, and rigorously. You must come to class on time, having done the reading, and be prepared to:
◦ share your thoughts and questions,
◦ listen attentively and with an open mind to others, and
◦ challenge each other respectfully to consider other points of view.

Some of the topics and materials covered by this class may be sensitive or graphic in nature. We will try to approach them with sensitivity, but please come to me with any concerns.
Required Readings

(All readings except those in bold will be available on Canvas or on reserve in Green Library. Texts in bold are available at the Stanford Bookstore.)

Primary
- Edgar Alan Poe, “Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841, 27 long pp.)
- Sherlock Holmes, The Sign of the Four (1890, 160 pp.)
- Agatha Christie, Murder on the Orient Express (1934, 304 pp.)
- Suki Kim, The Interpreter (2003, 304 pp.)
- Mukoma Wa Ngugi, Nairobi Heat (2011, 204 pp.)
- The Tunnel, season 2 (2016)

Secondary
- Tzvetan Todorov, “Typology of Detective Fiction”
- Edward Said, Orientalism (excerpts)
- Anthony Appiah, Cosmopolitanism (excerpts)
- Articles on individual texts

Learning Goals

By the end of this course, students will be able to…

Aesthetic and Interpretive Inquiry
- Identify the key aesthetic elements of detective fiction and discuss the genre’s engagement with themes of race, transnationalism, and cross-cultural interaction
- Use formal analysis and critical reading practices to understand, interpret, and discuss the nuances of detective fiction in particular (and literary narrative in general), including how it shapes and is shaped by historical, cultural, and sociopolitical contexts
- Write persuasively and compellingly by: 1) developing an argument for an original interpretation of a literary text, 2) pointing to relevant textual evidence and analyzing its importance, and 3) responding to other critical arguments in their own writing
- Use the writing process as a thinking tool to deepen their understanding and enjoyment of literature

Engaging Diversity
- Compare divergent perspectives on ethics, justice, community, and identity by writers from different historical, cultural, and racial backgrounds
- Examine works of detective fiction from different critical perspectives on such issues as race, immigration, colonialism, globalization, and universal justice
- Articulate how the power dynamics between different racial, national, social, and cultural groups influence (and are influenced by) literary representations of crime, innocence, and guilt
- Deepen personal and intellectual tools for understanding, appreciating, and engaging respectfully with worldviews different from their own
Major Assignments

Four short response papers (500 words: ~2 pages)
- Students will sign up for which weeks they will write a response paper.
- Papers are due at 12 pm on the day before class.

Write a short paper in which you engage thoughtfully and analytically with one or more readings from that week. This may take a number of different forms. You may want to close-read a particular passage, analyze a theme or problem, respond to a secondary source, make an argument, or pose a question and offer some possible answers to it. The point here is to use your writing to think through something that interests you, that you would like to share with your peers, and that you may consider expanding on for your longer, final paper.

Response papers will be read by your peers and will serve as discussion points for class the next day.

Research summary (800 words: ~3 pages)
- Students will sign up for which week they will write and present their research summary.
- Written research summaries are due at 12 pm on the day before class.

Choose a historical event or topic relevant to the texts and themes we’re studying and write a 2-3 page summary of your findings, citing at least 5 different scholarly sources. Make note of whether sources agree or disagree, and explain how your findings supplement, alter, or deepen your understanding of the text and subject they relate to. You will also give a short presentation (no more than 5 minutes) on your most interesting findings in class. Topics for your research summary must be approved by me in advance.

Some possible subjects may include (but are not restricted to):
- The early development of policing in the U.S./Europe
- Slave uprisings in the 19th century
- The Indian Rebellion of 1857
- Opioids in the late 19th century
- The Orient Express
- The Lindbergh kidnapping
- Contemporary U.S. immigration policies and laws
- The Rwandan genocide, or post-genocide NGOs
- Relevant biographical information for one of our authors

Final paper (2000-2500 words: ~8-10 pages)
- You must make an appointment with me during week 7 to discuss and get approval for your final paper topic.
- Draft due by Sunday, August 12 at 12pm.

Write an organized, well-argued, and insightful paper analyzing a specific research question about a work of detective fiction of your choice (you may choose a work not from the class, with my approval). You are encouraged to build on one or more of your previous short assignments, but you’re also welcome to choose a different topic. Your paper should incorporate attentive close readings of your primary text, as well as thoughtful engagement with at least three relevant critical (and possibly historical) secondary sources.
Grading

Class attendance and participation: 20%
Short response papers: 20%
Research summary: 15%
Final paper: 45%
* Papers submitted late will be penalized one letter grade for every day past the deadline.

Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oaes).

Honor Code

The Honor Code is the University's statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work:

The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:
1. that they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading.
2. that they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.
3. The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.
4. While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

Course Material Support

Stanford University and its faculty are committed to ensuring that all courses are financially accessible to all students. If you are an undergraduate who needs assistance with the cost of course textbooks, supplies, materials and/or fees, you are welcome to ask the Diversity & First-Gen Office for assistance by completing their questionnaire on course textbooks & supplies: http://tinyurl.com/jpgbarn or by contacting Joseph Brown, the Associate Director of
the Diversity and First-Gen Office (jlbrown@stanford.edu; Old Union Room 207). Dr. Brown is available to connect you with resources and support while ensuring your privacy.

Class Schedule

Unit 1: Murder, Race, and Empire

Week 1
- Tues: Introduction; Todorov, “Typology of Detective Fiction” (in class)
- Thurs: Poe, “Murders in the Rue Morgue”

Week 2
- Tues: Homes, The Sign of the Four (first half)
- Thurs: Homes, The Sign of the Four (finish)

Week 3
- Tues: Excerpts from Said, Orientalism and Appiah, Cosmopolitanism
- Thurs: Christie, Murder on the Orient Express (Part 1)

Week 4
- Tues: Christie, Murder on the Orient Express (Part 2)
- Thurs: Christie, Murder on the Orient Express (Part 3)

Unit 2: Transnational Crime

Week 5
- Tues: Kim, The Interpreter (chapters 1-8)
- Thurs: Kim, The Interpreter (chapters 9-15)

Week 6
- Tues: Kim, The Interpreter (finish)
- Thurs: Ngugi, Nairobi Heat (pp. 1-101)

Week 7
- Tues: Ngugi, Nairobi Heat (finish)
- Thurs: The Tunnel.

Final paper draft due on Sunday, August 12 at 12pm.

Week 8
- Tues: The Tunnel. In-class: workshop final paper drafts
- Thurs: The Tunnel

Final paper due on Saturday, August 18 at 12pm.
Suggested Secondary Readings


