

ENG 399: Crime Noir
UR: 12-1:20
Brendan O’Kelly
Office: PLC 519

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192 ANS
bokelly@uoregon.edu
Office Hours: W: 10-2

This class will focus on a genre of American fiction, comic, and film somewhat loosely defined as crime noir. Distinct from detective fiction, hardboiled crime noir centers on criminal protagonists, often of the “career” variety. Tracing the trajectory of such a genre from its inception in 1920s hardboiled crime fiction through the 20th century and into the present reveals the philosophical stances, the cultural and social prejudices, and the economic and historic contexts from which the texts and films emerge. We will explore the formal and structural range of this genre through a wide range of novels, films, and graphic texts: foundational hardboiled novels by Dashiell Hammett and Paul Cain, and midcentury noirs from Dorothy B. Hughes and Horace McCoy; classic film noir from Frank Tuttle and Anthony Mann, and abstractly stylized neo-noir from Michael Mann; graphic texts ranging from Drake Waller’s 1950 “picture novel” *It Rhymes with Lust* to Frank Miller’s neo-noir *Sin City*, and the recent turn to crime noir conventions in Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillip’s *Criminal*.

Reading and Viewing: Complete all reading assignments before class and bring the assigned reading with you. I strongly encourage you to mark important passages and take notes in your book to prepare for discussions and writing assignments. **Always bring the assigned reading to class.** View assigned films before class. I will provide information for online viewing on Canvas. Films may require online rental.

Required Texts:

Ed Brubaker and Sean Philips, *Criminal Vo 1: Coward* (2007) 978-1-6321517-0-4
Paul Cain, *Fast One* (1932) 978-1-6275506-7-3
Dashiell Hammett, *The Glass Key*, (1931) 978-0-679-72262-5
Dorothy B. Hughes, *Ride the Pink Horse* (1946) MysteriousPress.com/Open Road Ebook
Available through Amazon, Apple, Google, and Kobo. Some used paperbacks are also available online.
Horace McCoy, *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* (1948) Midnight Classics/Open Road Ebook
Available through Amazon, Apple, Google, and Kobo. Some used paperbacks are also available online.
Frank Miller, *Sin City Voll: The Hard Goodbye* (1992) 978-1-5930729-3-3
Drake Waller, *It Rhymes with Lust* (1950) Depending on availability, may be available at the Duckstore in the next few weeks.
Additional readings will be available on Canvas.

Films:

Anthony Mann, *Raw Deal* (1948), streaming on Amazon Prime, available for online rental.
Michael Mann, *Thief* (1981), streaming on Amazon Prime and Hulu Plus, available for online rental.
Frank Tuttle, *This Gun for Hire* (1942), watch in class.

Coursework and Grading

Attendance: I take attendance every class. You are allowed two absences without penalty. Each subsequent absence will result in a deduction of 1/3 of a letter grade from your final grade (i.e. A to an A-, A- to B+) except in the instance of a documented medical or family emergency. **On a fifth unexcused absence you will automatically fail the course.** If you miss a class, obtain notes from a classmate and review them in detail before contacting me with any specific questions about those notes or the text.

Participation 20% of overall grade: Participation is mandatory. Productive, regular participation in class discussion will benefit your overall grade for the course. You must show respect for the ideas and opinions of other students. Disrespectful or disruptive classroom conduct will be penalized.

Leading Class Discussion: 10% of overall grade: You are each required to bring in a series of questions to lead discussion in class once during the quarter. Check with any other students leading discussion on the same day beforehand to ensure that your questions don't overlap. These questions should address the specifics of the assigned reading or film. That said, any aspect of the readings or films that you find interesting or confusing provides an opportunity for discussion. Your assigned day is your chance to choose the topic of discussion and direct the course of the class. I will pass around a signup sheet on and post it on Canvas. You are responsible for remembering what day you will lead discussion. Submit your questions on Canvas before class, or physically hand them in to me after. A large portion of your participation grade will reflect how well and how often you engage with the discussion questions of other students. **I will model effective discussion questions during the first week of class and provide examples on Canvas.**

Observation report on Schnitzer Museum's EC Comics Exhibit: 5% of overall grade: In conjunction with our class discussion of a sampling of EC crime comics on 5/12 you are required to visit the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art's EC Comics exhibit and write a short report on it.

Short Analysis Essays: 30% of overall grade: You will write 3 short analysis essays of approximately 2 pages, one on a novel, one on a film, and one on a graphic text. One of these essays will overlap with your questions from leading class discussion and you will sign up to write essays on the material for 2 additional course meetings. The material from these essays should provide a strong basis for class participation, and I will expect you to contribute extensively to discussion on days you submit an essay. Essays will be due on Canvas before class begins on the days on which you've signed up. Prompts for each type of essay (novel, film, comic) will be available on Canvas.

Final Essay: 35% of overall grade: You will write a 5-7 page final essay that will be due on Canvas on Tuesday, 6/7. Prompts will be available on Canvas at least 2 weeks prior to the due date.

Grade Breakdown:

Participation:	20%
Leading Class Discussion:	10%
EC Observation Report:	5%
Analysis Essays:	30%
Final Essay:	35%

Writing Guidelines: Papers must be double spaced and in 12 point standard font with one inch margins and minimal, single spaced headers (i.e. name, date, course title or number). As the English department's learning objectives state, essays must be focused and in clear, grammatically correct prose. Proofread your essays several times before submission. Citations should follow MLA format. Submit all writing assignments to Canvas in either DOC or DOCX format. Canvas does not process Pages or ODT files. It is your responsibility to ensure that your essay has been uploaded correctly before the deadline. If you

submit an essay in an incorrect format, you will not receive comments on it. *Late papers will be marked down one-third of a letter grade per day, including weekends (E.g., from A to A-, B+ to B, etc.)* and will not receive comments. **I will not accept late final papers.**

Academic Integrity:

All work must adhere to standards of academic honesty outlined in the Student Handbook. Do not turn in work prepared for other classes. Document all sources consulted, including websites and other Internet content. Plagiarism will result in failure for the course and additional sanctions as determined by the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards:

<http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards.aspx>

Accommodations for students with disabilities:

In compliance with UO policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for student with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first two weeks of the quarter, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with the Accessible Education Center (<http://aec.uoregon.edu> to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

Recommended Study Habits and University Resources:

University accreditation standards require at least 2 hours of work outside of class for each credit earned. This means that you are expected to dedicate ~8 hours/week of *outside of class* work. This will usually mean reading the assigned texts, but will also include time spent completing assignments, writing papers, and working on larger projects.

Numerous campus resources are available which you should avail yourself of if you desire assistance with academic or extra-academic issues. For a full list, please see the Canvas document “University Resources”; I will also discuss relevant resources throughout the quarter.

The English Department’s assessment procedure is built around six desired learning outcomes:

- 1) read literary and cultural texts with discernment and comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions;
- 2) draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
- 3) perform critical, formal analyses of literary, cinematic, and other cultural texts;
- 4) write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose;
- 5) employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;
- 6) employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, as they contribute to a critical essay’s thesis.

WARNING: Readings and viewings may contain explicit depictions of sex, violence, adult themes, coarse language, and material that some might find offensive. If you think that this might be a problem for you, please come talk to me about whether we can find a solution, or if this is the best class for you.

Course Schedule: The reading schedule will be updated on Canvas as the quarter progresses.

Gamblers

3/29: Intro

3/31: Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder" (Canvas);

Dashiell Hammett, *The Glass Key* (1931), chapters 1 & 2 (through page 48)

4/5: Hammett, *The Glass Key*, chapters 3-6 (through page 140)

4/7: Hammett, *The Glass Key*, finish novel.

4/12: Paul Cain, *Fast One* (1932), chapters 1-4 (through page 84).

4/14: Cain, *Fast One*, finish novel.

Career Criminals

4/19: Watch film in class: Frank Tuttle, *This Gun for Hire* (1942)

Borde and Chaumeton, "Towards a Definition of Film Noir" (Canvas)

Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir" (Canvas)

4/21: Tony Hilfer, Introduction to "The Crime Novel: A Deviant Genre" (Canvas);

Dorothy B. Hughes, *Ride the Pink Horse* (1946)

Discuss *This Gun for Hire*

4/26: Hughes, *Ride the Pink Horse* (1946)

Prison Breaks and Phi Beta Kappa Keys

4/28: Film: Anthony Mann, *Raw Deal* (1948)

Robert E. Smith, "Mann in the Dark: the Films Noir of Anthony Mann" (Canvas)

Wrap up discussion of *Ride the Pink Horse*

5/3: Horace McCoy, *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* (1948)

Wrap up discussion of *Raw Deal*

5/5: McCoy, *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye*

5/10: McCoy, *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye*

Crime Comics and the Picture Novel

5/12: Selection of EC Crime Comics (Canvas) / Schnitzer Exhibit

5/17: Drake Waller, *It Rhymes With Lust* (1950)

Genre and Abstraction

5/19: Film: Michael Mann, *Thief* (1981), additional reading on Canvas

5/24: Frank Miller, *Sin City Volume 1: The Hard Goodbye* (1991-92)

5/26: Miller, *Sin City Volume 1: The Hard Goodbye*; "The Customer is Always Right" and "Blue Eyes" (Canvas); clips from Rodriguez and Miller, *Sin City*, (2005)

5/31: Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips: *Criminal Volume 1: Coward* (2007)

6/2: *Criminal Volume 1: Coward*