ENG 399: American Detective Fiction
Course Syllabus
Winter 2011 CRN 22338
MWF 11:00-11:50 a.m.
176 Lokey Education Building

Instructor: Kathleen O’Fallon Office: 256 PLC
Hours: MWF 2:00-3:00 p.m. and by appointment
Phone: 346-0994 E-mail: kofallon@uoregon.edu

Course Description
The works of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Ross Macdonald constitute a coherent and influential tradition in twentieth-century popular fiction, so this course covers a substantial selection of these authors’ novels. In addition, the course examines the novels of contemporary writers—with an emphasis on women and minority writers—whose works build on the “hard-boiled detective” tradition while simultaneously critiquing it.

As the American detective hero negotiates the “mean streets” peopled by criminals and their victims, he reveals and—sometimes—challenges prevailing societal mores. “Pop” fiction is literally defined by its popularity, so it partakes in the attitudes of its time regarding honor, fairness, legality and violence. Moreover, it reveals prevailing opinions regarding gender, race and class. This course will explore the thematic, narrative and stylistic choices of the authors on the reading list and discuss their importance within the genre of detective fiction and in the American literary canon as a whole.

Required Texts
Dashiell Hammett The Maltese Falcon
“Samuel Spade’s jaw was long and bony, his chin a jutting v under the more flexible v of his mouth.”

Dashiell Hammett Red Harvest
“I first heard Personville called Poisonville by a red-haired mucker named Hickey Dewey in the Big Ship in Butte.”

Michael Connelly Black Echo
“The boy couldn’t see in the dark, but he didn’t need to.”

Julie Smith New Orleans Mourning
“Bitty would have to be propped up, and God knew what Henry would do.”

Raymond Chandler The Big Sleep
“It was about eleven o’clock in the morning, mid October, with the sun not shining and a look of hard wet rain in the clearness of the foothills.”

Walter Mosley Little Scarlet
“The morning air stilled smelled of smoke.”

Ross Macdonald  
_The Galton Case_
“The law offices of Wellesley and Sable were over a savings bank on the main street of Santa Teresa.”

Sara Paretsky  
_Blood Shot_
“I had forgotten the smell.”

Course Requirements

1. Reading of all assigned texts, to be completed by the second day each appears on the schedule. (First day discussion will avoid plot points, so as to avoid ruining the ending for those not finished, but no such courtesy will be extended on the second day.)

2. Prompt and regular attendance and participation in class discussion. Students are expected to BE PRESENT, both physically and mentally. This means tuning in to discussion, taking notes regarding important concepts, and offering commentary on assigned novels that is backed up by textual evidence. ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES MUST BE TURNED OFF AND PUT AWAY BY THE TIME CLASS BEGINS.

3. Regular reading quizzes on the second day of discussing a novel. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped in figuring your final grade.

4. One final GROUP ORAL PRESENTATION. Details of this assignment will be presented during Week 7.

5. Two 3-4 page essays, one of which will be a stylistic analysis of one novel, and one of which will be a comparison between a classic text and a contemporary text. You can choose the order in which you wish to write the essays. They will be due as noted in the schedule. Detailed instructions regarding the essays will be given during the REQUIRED WRITING WORKSHOP ON JAN. 14. Students who fail to attend the workshop cannot expect a grade higher than “B” on the two required essays.

Grades

20%  
Attendance and participation

20%  
Reading quizzes

40%  
Essays (each essay counts 20%)

20%  
Final oral presentation

Policy on Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty
All work submitted for this course must be your own and must be written exclusively for this course. Any borrowing of ideas or words from assigned texts or outside sources—whether it be in the form of quotations, summaries or paraphrases—must be clearly documented. For a further definition of plagiarism and information on documentation, refer to the summary of the Code of Student Conduct in the Schedule of Classes. Any student who violates this policy can expect, at the very least, to fail this class.

**Policy on Access for Students with Disabilities**

If you have a disability (physical or learning) which you think may affect your performance in this class, please see me during the first day of the term so we can make arrangements, if necessary, for your full access to all classroom activities.

**SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS**

**Week 1: January 3-7**

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<th>Day</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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| Monday    | Introduction: Why Study Detective Fiction?  
|           | Background lecture: Beginnings  
|           | Placing American detective fiction in context with French and English influences  
|           | Early American practitioners (A.K. Green, E.A. Poe) |
| Wednesday | The “Hard-boiled Dick”  
|           | Film: Documentary on *The Maltese Falcon* |
| Friday    | Background lecture: Hammett  
|           | Begin discussion of *The Maltese Falcon*, with emphasis on writing style |

**Week 2: January 10-14**

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<th>Day</th>
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| Monday    | Continue discussion of *The Maltese Falcon*  
|           | QUIZ |
| Wednesday | Finish discussion of *The Maltese Falcon* |
| Friday    | REQUIRED WRITING WORKSHOP |

**Week 3: January 17-21**

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<th>Day</th>
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<td>Monday</td>
<td>Martin Luther King Holiday Observed—NO CLASS</td>
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Wednesday  
Background lecture: The Pinkerton Detective Agency and the Continental Op  
Begin discussion of *Red Harvest*

Friday  
Finish discussion of *Red Harvest*  
QUIZ

**Week 4: January 24-28**

Monday  
Background lecture: The Police Procedural  
Begin discussion of *Black Echo*

Wednesday  
Continue discussion of *Black Echo*  
QUIZ

Friday  
Finish discussion of *Black Echo*

**Week 5: January 31-February 4**

Monday  
Background lecture: The City in the Detective Novel  
Begin discussion of *New Orleans Mourning*

Wednesday  
Continue discussion of *New Orleans Mourning*  
QUIZ

Friday  
Finish discussion of *New Orleans Mourning*  
FIRST ESSAY DUE

**Week 6: February 7-11**

Monday  
Background lecture: Chandler  
Begin discussion of *The Big Sleep*

Wednesday  
Continue discussion of *The Big Sleep*  
QUIZ

Friday  
Finish discussion of *The Big Sleep*

**Week 7: February 14-18**

Monday  
The “noir” genre and the detective on the radio

Wednesday  
The “noir” genre and the detective on film

Friday  
Preparation for final oral presentations

**Week 8: February 21-25**
Monday  
Background lecture: A minority report  
Begin discussion of *Little Scarlet*

Wednesday  
Continue discussion of *Little Scarlet*  
QUIZ

Friday  
Finish discussion of *Little Scarlet*

**Week 9: February 28-March 4**

Monday  
Background lecture: Macdonald and Freud  
Begin discussion of *The Galton Case*

Wednesday  
Continue discussion of *The Galton Case*  
QUIZ

Friday  
Finish discussion of *The Galton Case*

**Week 10: March 7-11 (“Dead Week”)**

Monday  
Background lecture: Feminist challenges to the “hard-boiled” tradition  
Begin discussion of *Blood Shot*

Wednesday  
Continue discussion of *Blood Shot*  
QUIZ

Friday  
Finish discussion of *Blood Shot*  
SECOND ESSAY DUE

**Finals Week: March 14-18**

Wednesday  
Final Exam period 10:15 a.m.-12:15 p.m.  
ORAL PRESENTATIONS