

## ENGLISH 200: DETECTIVE FICTION SPRING 2008

Dr. Casey Cothran

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Office Hours: 9:30-11:30 MW, 9:30-10:30 T, and by appointment

Class: TR 11:00-12:15 (Owens 202)

### TEXTS:

Christie, Agatha. *Murder at the Vicarage*. New York: Signet, 2000.

Collins, Wilkie. *The Moonstone*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2002.

Cornwell, Patricia. *The Body Farm*. New York: Berkley Books, 2007.

Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1994.

George, Elizabeth. *In Pursuit of the Proper Sinner*. New York: Bantam, 2000.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. New York: Scholastic, 1999.

### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

English 200 is a course that focuses on specific literary genres. In particular, this class will look at the mystery/detective fiction genre, exploring how past and present authors have struggled to write stories that explain the seemingly chaotic, immoral, and frightening conditions of life and death. The class will address questions such as: Does solving a murder mystery make the concept of death itself seem more acceptable and understandable? How has the detective novel changed over the past 160 years? Do we still believe in the existence of a Sherlock Holmes – a brilliant policeman who can solve any problem and discover any wickedness? What do we fear? How complex do we understand crimes and criminals to be? How do we define “crime”? How have advances in modern science affected the content and structure of the detective novel? How do novels merge together scientific ideas and literary tropes? How do these novels play on the fact that many readers see the “different” bodies of foreigners and handicapped people as frightening? How does a novel about crime address the strengths and weaknesses of society? Can all crimes be solved? If so, can the damage inflicted by crime/violence ever truly be overcome?

Additionally, papers and exams will aid students in their quests to become better readers, writers, and critical thinkers. Hopefully you will enjoy the topic and thus approach both the class discussion and the written assignments with enthusiasm!

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

This class is reading intensive. However, I do believe the reading is manageable, especially if you can train yourself to read a little bit each night, instead of trying to cram each day's homework into one reading session. *The Moonstone* is the most historic piece we will read; for this novel, you will be assigned to read 25 pages a day. As we take on more recent novels, the pace will increase, but you should still be able to complete the assigned reading in the time allotted. Indeed, I hope you will be inspired to sit down and devour the two modern bestsellers (by Patricia Cornwell and JK Rowling) in just a few sittings!

Over the course of the semester, you will write three short papers (2-3 pages each), one longer essay based on reading and research you will conduct outside of class (4-6 pages), and you will

be asked to complete 2 exams (both with writing components). Your final grade will also take into account how consistently you pass quizzes on your reading homework.

Response 1, Nineteenth-Century People and Ideas	10%
Response 2, The Character of the Detective	10%
Response 3, Crime Stories vs. Parlor Mysteries	10%
Essay on Independent Reading/Viewing	20%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Daily Quiz Grade and Class Participation	10%

### **GRADING STANDARDS**

Numerically, grades are as follows:

93-100	A	73-76	C
90-92	A-	70-72	C-
87-89	B+	67-69	D+
83-86	B	63-66	D
80-82	B-	60-62	D-
77-79	C+	59 and below	F

### **PLAGIARISM POLICY**

All work in this class that uses outside sources must be documented correctly in the MLA documentation style. Please review the English Department's policy on Using Borrowed Information at <http://www.winthrop.edu/english/plagiarism.htm>. You are responsible for reviewing the Code of Student Conduct in your *Student Handbook* and the description of plagiarism in *The Prentice-Hall Reference Guide to Grammar and Usage* and handling source materials correctly. If you turn in plagiarized work, I reserve the right to assign you a failing grade for the course. The University Policy on Plagiarism is explained at <http://www.winthrop.edu/studentaffairs/Judicial/judcode.htm> under section V, "Academic Misconduct."

We will be using [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) this semester; I will provide more information on that closer to the dates of those assignments. Papers not submitted to [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) will not be graded.

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Winthrop policy is that students who miss more than 25% of the classes in a semester cannot receive credit for the course. Additionally, missing class or coming to class unprepared will damage your daily grade, which counts as a significant percentage of your final average.

### **LATE PAPER/ ASSIGNMENT POLICIES**

Every day an assignment is late (including weekend days) is five points off the final grade. Generally, writing assignments may be turned in early, but not late, unless you have an amazing excuse.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact Ms. Gena Smith, Coordinator, Services for Students with Disabilities, at 323-3290, as soon as possible. Once you have your professor notification letter, please notify me so that I am aware of your accommodations well before the first accommodated assignment is due.

## TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

I conduct most of my business with students using e-mail. If you do not have an e-mail account, go to 15 Tillman immediately to set it up. All class e-mail will be sent to your campus e-mail address, so make sure you set it to forward to any off-campus account you use (e.g. Comporium, AOL, Yahoo!, etc.) You must have a working Winthrop POBox e-mail address by the third day of class. All students must subscribe to the class listserve.

**You can find the syllabus and additional course materials on my website:**

**<http://faculty.winthrop.edu/cothranc>**

## CLASS SCHEDULE:

Note: assignments are due on the days next to which they appear.

DATE	IN-CLASS DISCUSSION	HOMEWORK
Tuesday January 15	Introduction to Course	
Thursday January 17	Seringapatam	<i>The Moonstone</i> First Period: Prologue – Chapter 8 (1-53)
Tuesday January 22	Her jewel is lost!	<i>The Moonstone</i> First Period: Chapters 9-15 (53-117)
Thursday January 24	“People in high life” and “People in low life”	<i>The Moonstone</i> First Period: Chapters 16-23 (117-168)
Tuesday January 29	Christians and “Heathens”	<i>The Moonstone</i> Second Period: First Narrative (171-234)
Thursday January 31	“Behind your back, I loved you with all my heart and soul.”	<i>The Moonstone</i> Second Period: Second Narrative, Third Narrative through Chapter 5 (235-292)

Tuesday February 5	Ezra Jennings <b>Response 1 Due</b>	<i>The Moonstone</i> Second Period: Finish Third Narrative (293-348)
Thursday February 7	Mysteries Solved	<i>The Moonstone</i> (Finish book! 349-415)
Tuesday February 12	Supernatural Extravaganza	<i>The Hound of the Baskervilles</i> (Chapters 1-10)
Thursday February 14	The Chrysalis	<i>The Hound of the Baskervilles</i> (Finish book!)
Tuesday February 19	Little Old Nosey Ladies	<i>Murder at the Vicarage</i> (1-62)
Thursday February 21	No Class – Read at home with cocoa or coffee!	<i>Murder at the Vicarage</i> (63-111)
Tuesday February 26	Masks and Motives	<i>Murder at the Vicarage</i> (112-194)
Thursday February 28	Elaborate Traps <b>Response 2 Due</b>	<i>Murder at the Vicarage</i> (Finish book! 195-247)
Tuesday March 4	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>	
Thursday March 6	The Morgue	<i>The Body Farm</i> (1-77)
Tuesday March 11	Graphic Violence and the Modern Reader	<i>The Body Farm</i> (78-259)
Thursday March 13	Grief	<i>The Body Farm</i> (260-338)
Tuesday March 18	SPRING BREAK	
Thursday March 20	SPRING BREAK	
Tuesday March 25	Modern Detectives <b>Response 3 Due</b>	<i>In Pursuit of the Proper Sinner</i> (Read pages 1-

		385 over Spring Break)
Thursday March 27	Psychological Complexities	<i>In Pursuit of the Proper Sinner</i> (386-446)
Tuesday April 1	Police: Following Instinct, Following Orders	<i>In Pursuit of the Proper Sinner</i> (447-541)
Thursday April 3	Breaking Rules	<i>In Pursuit of the Proper Sinner</i> (542-592)
Tuesday April 8	Can you guess the ending?	<i>In Pursuit of the Proper Sinner</i> (Finish book!)
Thursday April 10	Discuss Independent Readings/Viewings	
Tuesday April 15	Discuss Independent Readings/Viewings <b>Paper Due on Independent Reading or Viewing</b>	
Thursday April 17	<i>Riddikulus!</i>	<i>Harry Potter</i> (1-95)
Tuesday April 22	Trust	<i>Harry Potter</i> (96-290)
Thursday April 24	Misreading Adults, Adults Misreading	<i>Harry Potter</i> (Finish book! 291-435)
Tuesday April 29	<b>Study Day</b>	
<b>Thursday May 1</b>	<b>FINAL EXAM 11:30 AM</b>	

## INDEPENDENT READING/VIEWING ASSIGNMENT

For this assignment I would like you to either 1) read a book, 2) watch a film, or 3) watch a series of television shows. The plots of the piece(s) you choose must be centered around characters who work to understand and solve crimes. You can read old or new texts (you might be interested in enjoying more Sherlock Holmes or Agatha Christie, or you may want to look at other current bestselling authors like Nora Roberts or Sue Grafton). If you choose a film, you may look for a classic like Bogart's *The Maltese Falcon* or Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, or you may choose a more modern work like *The Usual Suspects* or *Se7en*. If you are interested in film, you also may choose to watch one of the wonderful works on the PBS "Mystery" series. (Indeed, this show often presents pieces by authors we are reading for class; PBS has made movie versions of Christie's Marple and Poirot novels and of Elizabeth George's Lyndley books.) If you choose television media, you may want to watch 3-4 episodes (*CSI Miami* or *House* or *Law and Order*... whatever you choose) so that you get a feel for the show's structure and for the characters of the detectives.

After you have read or viewed the material you have chosen, you will want to write a 4-6 page (typed, double-spaced) paper that discusses how this material relates to both historic and modern mystery/detective fictional works. Begin by briefly describing the plot and characters presented in the piece. Then discuss how the piece relates to some of the works we have read for class. How does the work you have chosen fit into the mystery "tradition"? What does it do that is new? What makes it a valuable piece of art? (Or perhaps it is formulaic and unremarkable!) How is it designed to titillate and/or comfort readers/viewers? Is it successful? Why or why not?

Please feel free to quote from the work as you make your arguments. You also may wish to include some research on the piece. Research sources might include book, movie, or television reviews, as well as critical articles on either the author, the piece, or the mystery genre itself. Be sure to quote properly and use MLA format.