Unsolved Mysteries: Reimagining the Detective Novel

“The detective… has a range of awareness that startles you, but it belongs to him by right, because it belongs to the world he lives in.”

--Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder"

A mystery… breaks with the way things present themselves under conditions that we take to be normal, so that our minds do not manage to fit the uncanny event into ordinary reality. The mystery thus leaves a kind of scratch on the seamless fabric of reality.”

-Luc Boltanski, Mysteries and Conspiracies

Description
In this class, we will study literary writings and films that borrow from the Mystery genre to pose larger questions about human existence. We’ll consider political questions about race, class, gender, and power as well as metaphysical questions about human desire, moral courage, and our place in the universe. After reading genre classics, we will study diverse literary works that may not fit neatly into the crime genre but that play with the desire to uncover truth. Students will be required to read and analyze the texts in a series of response papers and longer essays, and will embark on a creative Investigation (or research project) involving multiple modes of research.

Required Texts:
- Haruki Murakami, A Wild Sheep’s Chase
- Javier Marias, Tomorrow in the Battle Think on Me
- Rivka Galchen, Atmospheric Disturbances
- Several films available at Bobst Library
- Additional short stories/articles that I will ask you to download and print

Requirements
Class Preparedness and Participation: In a seminar we learn collaboratively so we will all depend on you to arrive on time with assignments done, ready to listen, think, speak, write, learn. If you need to miss class for a legitimate reason, email me to let me know when I can expect your homework, and contact your classmates to discuss what you missed. If you have more than two unexcused absences, your grade will be lowered by a full letter. If you have four unexcused absences, you will not be able to pass the class.

Reading: This course is reading intensive. You can expect reading assignments to average 100 to 150 pages per week. Most of it is fiction, but we will also read some criticism and theory.

Writing: You will write short responses to the readings or films throughout the semester. These are not individually graded but they will be graded as a whole. Failure to turn them in on time or to give them adequate thought will lower that grade. YOU MUST TURN IN AT LEAST 8 (out of 12) RESPONSES by the end of the semester (They can vary in length, but should be roughly 1,800 words total). I will give you feedback on this in the middle of the semester.
You will also write two longer essays (at least 750 words) and one longer research proposal (at least 1600 words). At the end of the semester you will have the opportunity to write another essay to raise your grade.

Presentations: You will give two presentations. (1) You will present an assigned critical text to the class. At the end of the semester, you will do an oral presentation on the research Investigation of your choosing (related to your research proposal).

Grading

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short response papers</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short essays</td>
<td>30% (15% each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Text presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigation Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigation proposal (2500 words)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparedness and Participation</td>
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Academic Integrity: Please carefully review the College’s policies on academic integrity. The University makes no distinction between intentional and unintentional plagiarism. This means that when writing, always take care to distinguish between your own words and the words of other writers and your classmates. Ideas are valuable commodities—we’ll discuss this quite a bit over the course of the semester.

Resources

- **The Writing Center** is an excellent resource, staffed by Expository Writing Program faculty who meet with students to help them with their writing. They don’t do the work for you—they don’t edit or proofread your work or give you ideas—but they can help you figure out what you need to do in order to improve your writing. To register as a client and to schedule an appointment, go to nyu.mywconline.com. It’s wise to schedule appointments well in advance of anticipated need, as appointment slots fill up quickly around essay deadlines.

- **Disability Resources** The Moses Center for Students with Disabilities provides comprehensive services and programs for undergraduate and graduate students with hearing and visual impairments, mobility impairments, learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders, chronic illnesses, and psychological impairments. The Moses Center functions to determine qualified disability status and to assist students in obtaining appropriate accommodations and services. Services provided are designed to encourage independence and self-advocacy, backed by a comprehensive system of supports. Learn more about their services and programs at nyu.edu/csd or here The Moses Center for Students with Disabilities.

- **Wellness Exchange and Counseling Services** College life can be stressful and, at times, overwhelming. If you’re feeling overwhelmed, I encourage you to reach out if you need help. The NYU Wellness Exchange offers free, confidential counseling services. You can reach them 24/7 at the hotline 212-443-9999 or during walk-in hours (no appointment is needed) at 726 Broadway, 344. Find out more by visiting the NYU Wellness Exchange website: http://www.nyu.edu/students/health-and-wellness/counseling-services.html

- **Residential International Student Engagement** (R.I.S.E.) [https://goo.gl/u1E0iy]
- **Academic Resource Center** [https://goo.gl/4OetVO]
- **NYU Libraries** [http://library.nyu.edu]
- **Resources for Commuter and Off-Campus Students** [https://goo.gl/ij50NS]
A Note on Respect and Civil Discourse
Each of you has something vital to offer to our class, and I ask that you bring that offering with respect, dignity, and regularity. Each of you comes from a different place (or many different places), intellectually, culturally, and emotionally. This is wonderful. But, as we talk, think, and argue, it is crucial that each of us maintains a respect for every other person in the class and that we very strongly resist the assumption that our ideas are “normal” or “right” just because we are used to them. We are here to challenge our ideas and to cultivate awareness. Please listen to yourself, to each other, and to me; I promise to do the same. In confronting the world around us, we may engage in a reading or a conversation that makes you feel uncomfortable. Don’t hesitate to bring up this discomfort in the class discussion, or, if you’d like, to express it privately to me after class.

Schedule

Week 1 - Week 2: The Mystery of Narrative: What does it reveal?
Read: Chandler and Christie handouts (60 pages)

Week 3 – Week 4: The Mystery of Power: How does it reveal itself?
Read: from Edward P. Jones (handout, 10 pages); Begin A Wild Sheep Chase (first 80 pages)
Watch: Chinatown
Due: First Short Essay (End of week 4)

Week 5– Week 6: The Mystery of Existence: Who are you?
Read: A Wild Sheep’s Chase (the next 270 pages)

Week 7 – Spring Break – Week 8 – Week 9: The Mystery of the Other: Who is ?
Read: Tomorrow in the Battle Think on Me (311 pages)
Due: Second short essay (end of week 7)

Week 10– Week 11: The Mystery of Intimacy: How do I love thee?
Read: Atmospheric Disturbances, (250 pages)

Week 12–14: The Mystery of Outsiders? Where are you headed and why?
Watch Vagabond
Read: “The Wayfarer” (handout, 15 pages)
Due: Research Proposal (end of week 12)