

Sophister Module Description Template 2025-26

Full Name: THE ART OF MURDER: 19TH TO 21ST CENTURY CRIME WRITING

Short Name: THE ART OF MURDER

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Dr Clare Clarke <clare.clarke@tcd.ie>

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught: MT

Year: SS

Module Content and Learning Aims:

This module investigates the development of crime fiction as a genre, from its beginnings in the 19th century with super-detective Sherlock Holmes, right up to the present day. The module explores the development of various crime sub-genres, including the classic detective short story, the clue puzzle form, developed by Agatha Christie, the American hard-boiled school, characterized by the work of Dashiell Hammett, and mid-20th-century noir fiction, which explored the dark recesses of the criminal psyche. The module also looks at texts by black and feminist writers, exploring the intersections between crime fiction, race, and gender. Lastly, we look at some of the most popular recent crime sub-genres including Nordic noir, domestic noir, and the true crime podcast narrative form. This module will appeal to students with an interest in contemporary fiction and crime fiction, as it examines how the crime genre forces us to think about the differences between the law, justice, and morality, as well as exploring the intersections between issues of class, race, and gender with ideas about criminality and detecting.

Content note: Many of the texts on this course feature murder, sexual assault, and abuse. Detailed content notes will be provided for each text.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this module students will be able to:

- Trace the emergence and development of the crime genre through the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries

- Identify and examine key themes in 20th-21st century crime and detective fiction
- Discuss the themes and concerns of the set texts in relation to their social, historical, and political contexts
- Close read and analyse the primary texts paying attention to form, structure, language
- think critically about the ways in which the detective genre depicts criminality and heroism in terms of class, gender, and race
- trace and interrogate developments in the history of crime fiction criticism, examining in detail a number of key approaches– Formalist, Foucauldian, Historicist, feminist
- Demonstrate skills in research, oral and written communication, and teamwork

Assessment Details:

- Number of Components: 1
- Name/Type of Component(s) essay
- Word Count of Component(s): 5000 words
- Percentage Value of Component(s): 100%

Preliminary Reading List:

WEEK 1: Introduction: texts and theories. Arthur Conan Doyle, “A Scandal in Bohemia” (1891) and Tzvetan Todorov, “The Typology of Detective Fiction.”

WEEK 2: Clue-Puzzle: Agatha Christie, *The Murder on the Orient Express* (1930)

WEEK 3: Hardboiled: Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930)

WEEK 4: Noir: Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1955)

WEEK 5: Race: Chester Himes, *A Rage in Harlem* (1957)

WEEK 6: True crime: Sarah Koenig and Julie Snyder, *Serial* (2014) [podcast]

WEEK 7: READING WEEK

WEEK 8: Feminist detective fiction: Gender: Sara Paretsky, *Bitter Medicine* (1987)

WEEK 9: The Serial Killer Thriller: *Red Dragon* by Thomas Harris (1988)

WEEK 10: Domestic Noir: Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl* (2012)

WEEK 11: The 'Less Dead': Marie Rutkoski, *Real Easy* (2022)

WEEK 12: Recap and revision/essay consultations

Please note:

- Curriculum information is subject to change.
- Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.