

HS 2020 – B.A. Seminar
American Crime
Prof. Elisabeth Bronfen
Wednesdays 14.00-15.45

A fascination with crime has inhabited the American cultural imaginary from its beginnings, speaking not only to the birth of the nation out of its war of independence, but also to its investment in the notion of regeneration through violence. At the same time, crime stories represent an extreme form of the American dream with its claim on radical personal self-definition, and, hence, they make up the genre in which personal obsessions with excess and guilt come to be negotiated. Crime, furthermore, can serve as *the* trope for engaging with the antagonisms at the heart of the public realm, but also for imagining subjectivity and for thinking about writing. This course will be taught online with in-class elements. (Texts with a * will be made available on OLAT. Hughes & Holding's novels can be found in [Women Crime Writers: Four Suspense Novels of the 1940s](#), while Millar's text can be found in [Collected Millar: Legendary Novels of Suspense](#).)

(1) Sept 16 Meet & Greet, Introduction: Joan Didion, "Sentimental Journey" (1993)*

BEGINNING OF THE PSYCHO-THRILLER

(2) Sept 23 Edgar Allan Poe, "Ligeia"* (1838), "The Black Cat"* (1843), "Berenice"* (1835)

CLASSIC AMERICAN NOIR IN LITERATURE AND FILM

(3) Sept 30 Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest* (1929)

(4) Oct 7 Ernest Hemingway, "The Killers"* (1927) & Robert Siodmak, *The Killers* (1946 film)

(5) Oct 14 Billy Wilder, *Double Indemnity* (1944 film)

(6) Oct 21 Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye* (1953)

(7) Oct 28 Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho* (1960 film)

FEMALE NOIR

(8) Nov 4 Ann Petry, *The Street* (1946)

(9) Nov 11 Dorothy Hughes, *In a Lonely Place* (1947)

(10) Nov 18 Elizabeth Sanxay Holding, *The Blank Wall* (1947)

(11) Nov 25 Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955)

(12) Dec 2 Margaret Millar, *The Fiend* (1964)

REVISITING THE GENRE

(13) Dec 9 Susan Grant, Ayelet Waldman & Michael Chabon, *Unbelievable* (2019, Netflix series)

(14) Dec 16 Megan Abbot, *Dare Me* (2012)

Background Reading

- Nickerson, Catherine Ross. *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Priestman, Martin. *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Scaggs, John. *Crime Fiction*. The New Critical Idiom. Routledge, 2005.
- Worthington, Heather. *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Course Requirements

Portfolio

Thesis Papers

All students must prepare **a thesis paper as a preliminary discussion for 10 of the seminar sessions** (200-300 words), to be posted on OLAT by 9 a.m. on Tuesday of the respective week. Each thesis paper should, as the title suggests, entail a thesis, but could also contain a series of questions, comments or associations. It should present an argument; indeed, it should help you practice your skills at argumentation. At the same time, it will facilitate class discussion and allow us to see in what directions you have been thinking while preparing for each session. The point is not to read out what you have written but, using what you have developed in writing, to enter into a dialog with the other members of the class. The thesis papers will count towards your portfolio and, thus, are compulsory. Please note that thesis papers that are not posted **on time** will not be counted towards your points, i.e. portfolio grade.

Short Research Paper

Students will do background research on the subject of session and compile this research in a short essay. They will be asked to speak to the content of their research **in the corresponding session**. It should be 2 pages long. A final version of the research paper should be sent as a PDFs **one week after the session** to morgane.ghilardi@es.uzh.ch.

→ At the end of the semester, please **compile the thesis statements you have posted** and **research paper** using the template provided on OLAT. It is this set of papers that will be graded. The portfolio accounts for **20% of the final grade**. Send a PDF version of the portfolio to morgane.ghilardi@es.uzh.ch by **December 18, 2020**.

Final Essay

All students should hand in an essay (4000-5000 words) by **March 1, 2021**. It should be handed in as a PDF version (incl. *Selbstständigkeitserklärung*) to morgane.ghilardi@es.uzh.ch.

The essay, which accounts for **80% of the final grade**, should be based on the materials covered in this B.A. seminar, as well as the class discussions. Your essay must include a strong thesis statement (this can be several sentences) at the beginning of your paper (within the first page). A thesis is a statement that is arguable; but also one that requires a coherent argument and materials supporting the argument. You are also expected to do research on your topic beyond the recommended literature and the theoretical texts discussed in the seminar. Before writing the final essay, please discuss the outline with Prof. Elisabeth Bronfen or one of her assistants, Morgane Ghilardi and Hannah Schoch, in an office hour.