

MEDITERRANEAN NOIR

Comparative Studies of Crime Fiction by the Sea

GESM 120g: Seminar in Humanistic Inquiry

M/W 5:00-6:20; VKC 254

Professor HILL (edwinhil@usc.edu)



COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is *noir fiction*? Since its transnational, trans-Atlantic emergence, *noir* fiction has become a global genre that continues to evolve and to attract the attention of popular readers and writers all over the world. For many writers, the noir fiction genre serves as a critical tool for analysis of contemporary history and pressing sociocultural and political issues. Our course moves the focus from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea, where writers adopt and adapt the genre to contemplate issues ranging from political corruption, clandestine migration, and Islamophobia to philosophies of hospitality, ethics of forgiveness, and the culinary aesthetics of good food and wine.

This semester, our readings will include works by novelists Albert Camus (France), Jean-Claude Izzo (France), Yasmina Khadra (Algeria), Kamel Daoud (Algeria) and Youssef Fadel (Morocco). Noir fiction often focuses on existential crises and the darker sides of the human condition, frequently tapping into the social malaise of the current socio-historical moment. The comparative nature of our course's study of noir fiction will challenge us to contemplate from multiple standpoints some of the most demanding questions our contemporary moment, as well as some of the most warped and twisted facets of the human condition.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Learn about and develop a critical appreciation for the history, formal characteristics, tropes, and thematic concerns of one of the most important literary genres of the 20th and 21st century.
- Develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills that build from lectures and class discussions.
- Analyze and explore the fraught ethical situations and sociocultural, political, and personal dilemmas constructed through the genre.
- Examine the important history of migration and cultural exchange between Europe and North Africa in the Mediterranean via cities like Marseilles, Barcelona, Naples, and Algiers.

REQUIRED READING

To avoid any delays and to save money students may want to consider online book sellers as well. Please do buy a hardcopy of the book rather than Kindle version, if possible.

1. Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (Vintage March 13, 1989) ISBN-10: 9780679720201
2. Kamel Daoud, *The Meursault Investigation* (Other Press, 2015) ISBN-10: 1590517512
3. Yasmina Khadra, *Double Blank* (Toby Press, 2005) ISBN-10: 9781592641192
4. Jean-Claude Izzo, *Total Chaos* (Europa Editions, 2013) ISBN-10: 1609451260
5. ---. *Chourmo* (World Noir, 2019) ISBN-10: 1609454502
6. ---, *Garlic, Mint, and Sweet Basil* (Europa Editions, 2013) ISBN-10: 9781609451158
7. Youssef Fadel, *Hashish* (Afrique Orient, 2013) ISBN-10: 9981257265
8. There will be a few additional essays or videos made available on Blackboard. Students should print out any texts and bring them to class the day of the discussion.

*****Please note*****

This course requires a *lot* of reading; keeping up is essential. Grades are based on an evaluation of each student's close-reading abilities, critical thinking and analytical writing skills as well as active participation in discussions, but it all begins with active reading. Make sure that you take lots of notes when you read, mark interesting and important passages in your book so you can follow themes, pay attention to the structure of the novels and their aesthetic qualities, keep track of your impressions at different points in the novel so you can look back to examine how the novel unfolded for you. Each week we focus on a particular theme, but as you read each book keep in mind all of the themes and assignments outlined in the course schedule and mark the relevant pages so that you can quickly refer back to key passages.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

Participation (10%)

Students who receive an "A" in their participation grade have near perfect attendance, come prepared to work, actively participate in every class session, and bring their best effort and positive energy to small group work. They offer interesting contributions to the classroom discussion every session, and they prove themselves to be active listeners by the way they follow the discussion, take lots of notes, and build on the ideas and comments of other students. "A" students observe all of the course policies, at all times. "B" level participation is characterized by solid attendance (less than three absences during the semester) and regular participation in classroom discussions. These students frequently volunteer ideas and comments and always show that they are actively listening and taking notes. They may not always have answers, but they do ask questions when they don't understand. They also actively participate in small group work and always observe the course policies given in the syllabus. Students who receive a "C" in their participation grade only speak in the class if directly asked a question. They are not disruptive, but they may miss several sessions or seem half absent when they do come to class (falling asleep, checked out, trying to do other work in class, steps out of classroom regularly, checks cell phone under the desk). These students may fail to observe course policies at times. Sometimes these students will come to class without their book or note taking materials. "D" and "F" grades in participation are for those students who regularly fail to show up for class physically or mentally. Their poor attitude about the course, class discussions, or group work brings negative energy to the classroom. When called upon these students decline sharing their ideas or thinking on their feet. They never ask questions. These students thus essentially refuse to contribute anything in the course.

Assignments and Quizzes (20%)

Homework assignments, in-class assignments, and quizzes give students the space to develop their reading skills, think about core questions, and prepare for the close-reading essays as well as the midterm and final. *Homework assignments* must be turned in via Blackboard before the class session. They require that you fully respond to the prompt with a single coherent paragraph of 300-500 words, excluding citations. The homework response should be developed by examining specific passages/page numbers chosen by the student. When submitting homework on Blackboard, copy and paste your response into the appropriate field, do not submit homework as an attachment or email. Grading is as follows: 5pts = thoughtful complete paragraph that fully responds to the prompt and engages with the text; 4pts = relatively solid response to the prompt; 3pts = paragraph response is perfunctory or careless, somewhat incomplete or showing insufficient attention to the text or parts of the question; 2/1 pts = Incomplete, poor writing, does not really respond to the prompt. *In-Class Assignments* are usually done together in small groups and are due at the end of the class session. Successful completion of assignments and quizzes will require students to keep up with the reading schedule. Taking notes during class and while reading is really important. On days that we have a quiz, students will be allowed 5-10 minutes at the beginning of class to silently review their notes before the quiz begins (so make sure to take lots of notes and to always bring your notebook and book to class). No make-up quizzes or homework assignments will be offered. Late homework will not receive credit. (There are however extra-credit opportunities, see below.)

Three Close-reading essays (60%)

The close-reading essays are 1000-1200 words each, not including cited material. Essays give students a chance to build an original interpretation of the material while developing their critical thinking and analytical writing skills. Like the private eyes and professional assassins of noir fiction, students must develop a critical eye, ear, and feeling for the texts. The essays will require students locate and

investigate key *scenes*, appropriately identify and examine the *evidence*, and *prove* what the novel is doing. They must interrogate the words (and silences), the actions and the passions of the protagonists and the narrator in order to reveal the deeper motivations and meanings of textual action. The essays must be turned in through Blackboard. Please note: all essays will be run through the university's academic integrity software to check for plagiarism.

Final (10%)

The final exam is comprehensive. It will likely consist of short answer and essay questions generated from class lectures and discussions, assignments and quizzes from throughout the course. It gives students the opportunity to reflect on the entire semester, and to respond to specific as well as broad and comparative questions about our entire corpus of novels and additional texts, lectures and discussions, and close- readings.

Extra-Credit (1 point per session added to overall assignment grade)

To enrich our understanding of the genre, and to give us the opportunity to get to know one another better, there will be three extra-credit Sunday film sessions scheduled. All you have to do is show up and watch the film in its entirety. We will watch French and Italian language films with subtitles. Feel free to bring food and friends, but everyone must respect course policies about the use of cell phones and laptops. Possible films include: *Plein soleil* [*Purple Noon*] (1960), *Rififi* (1955), *Les Diaboliques* (1955), *L'insoumis* [*Have I the Right to Kill*] (1964), *Le Samouraï* (1967), *Les Marins perdus* [*The Lost Seamen*] (2003), *Ossessione* [*Obsession*] (1942), *Riso Amaro* [*Bitter Rice*] (1949), *Senza pietà* [*Without Pity*] (1948), *L'assassino* [*The Assassin*] (1961), *La decima vittima* [*The 10th Victim*] (1965), *A Ciascuno il suo* [*We Still Kill the Old Way*] (1967), *Lo Straniero* [*The Stranger*] (1967), *Zero* (2013).



Pablo Picasso, "Mediterranean Landscape" (1953)

COURSE POLICIES

Email Communication

Students should email the professor questions and concerns about the course from their officially registered USC email account. Please include the name of the course in your heading. With the ubiquity of internet ready devices at our fingertips and the speed of email transmissions it is easy to overlook the type of etiquette most university professors expect in their email communications. Consider the email message a letter to your professor. Observe courteous rules of address and be careful of language and salutations that may come across as too familiar or cavalier. Also, remember that professors receive dozens of work related emails per day from students, faculty, administration, professional organizations, university presses, and more. For this reason, it will normally take a couple of days before email messages can be read and returned.

Office Hours

Students can schedule one-on-one meetings with me any time during the semester. I am available to meet with students immediately following our second session. I encourage all students to schedule at least one visit with me during the semester. If my office hour time does not work for you we can schedule another time to meet.

Electronic Devices

In this course we will take a journey together back and forth across the Mediterranean. Treat our time together like a flight in thought, discussion, and imagination where all electronic devices must be turned off or put in airplane mode (rather than on vibrate or silent) and safely stored away for the duration of the trip. The use of laptops and cell phones is not allowed during class lectures and large group discussions. They may however be used to work on and submit in- class small group assignments.

Attendance

Students lose participation points when they miss class (physically and mentally), but sometimes missing class is unavoidable. If you do have to miss a session, please: 1) contact the professor with your excuse (and provide a written doctor's note when necessary) and 2) catch up with a classmate (or two) to ask if you can copy their notes (even if they say you did not miss much). Generally, when a student misses class for whatever reason, it is the student's responsibility, and not the professor's, to get caught up with the rest of the group. Ask your classmates if you can copy any handouts, assignment instructions, schedule changes, etc. that you may have missed while you were out. Remember: exam questions and quizzes will be drawn from our classroom discussions so jotting down the questions that guided our discussion and the various ways that discussion unfolded will be very important for your performance in the course.

Plagiarism

Taking someone else's words with or without their consent and portraying them as if they were your own constitutes an act of plagiarism. This includes cutting and pasting from websites and copying passages from books and articles as well as copying another student's work. Whether copying verbatim or paraphrasing, this practice is not acceptable. Many professors now regularly use Academic Integrity software or use Google to investigate student essays wherever there is the suspicion of plagiarism. Be warned: academic dishonesty will be taken very seriously in this course. Students guilty of cheating or plagiarism face failing the class and in some cases, may face academic sanction up to and including expulsion from the university. For USC policy on plagiarism and academic dishonesty, see: <http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>

Disability Services

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services Program (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.