

# Film 4910: Murder Most Foul: Crime Films

TTH 3:45-5:50

LEML 122

Professor: Dr. Kirsten Thompson

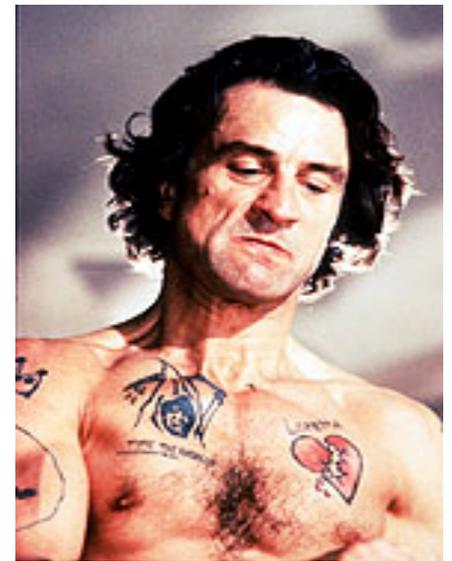
---



How have crime and violence been central concerns in cinema since its beginnings? What kinds of genres and subgenres have formed around the representation of the criminal and violence? What is the relationship of crime cinema to the formation of modernity, and how does it engage with key technologies like the fingerprint, biometrics and DNA that map and profile the body? How does the crime film engage with issues of race, class, gender and nation? From the gangster film, 'whodunnit', film noir and neo-noir, to the heist film, erotic thriller, serial killer film, crime television and the work of Hitchcock, Coppola and Nolan, we will survey a variety of different narrative and generic formulations of the crime film, from juvenile delinquents on the run to murder amongst friends, to the

revenge drama. Throughout we will consider the narrative function of "detection" and its relationship to the spectatorial experience of consuming and reconstructing specific questions of the whodunit-- namely, who did it? and why? We'll look at how crime cinema engages with discourses in criminal law and psychology, including sociopathy, *mens rea* and *actus reus*, the insanity defense and the M'Naghton rule. The class will then conclude with an examination of the serial killer in recent cinema, pulp fiction, and television. Films may include some of the following: *Shallow Grave*, *Cape Fear*, *Blood Simple*, *Heavenly Creatures*, *The Godfather*, *Goodfellas*, *Se7en*, *Oldboy*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Hannibal*.

This class can fulfill your genre requirement for Film Majors (PEP required)



Each week the first class will be a screening of a feature film, while the second class will be devoted to group work, viewing of clips and some lecturing (Roughly 70 % group work & analysis and 30 % lecture). Together we will practice close analysis of the weekly readings and film, and spend time in class learning about close reading of the crime film and sharpening our observational and analytical skills and aesthetic vocabulary. You will be expected to participate in class discussions, complete all class assignments on time and see all scheduled films. As the quarter system moves very quickly, it is essential you come to class prepared. Each week as part of your homework you will also be required to watch one additional film on your own (via your own personal subscription streaming services like Hulu Amazon, etc, although some films are available on 4 hour reserve at the library). Please bring your textbooks and syllabus to every class and have done the reading in advance of the Tuesday screening.

Course Learning Objectives: At the end of the semester you will be able to

- demonstrate knowledge of the narrative and stylistic conventions of different types of crime genres, including the whodunit, the detective, film noir, gangster film and other examples
- demonstrate a general understanding of critical terms and concepts relating to the crime genre
- understand the relationship of crime film/media to specific historical and cultural contexts
- critically analyse a range of scholarly and creative texts
- conduct independent research on topics relating to crime films
- communicate scholarly arguments about crime films in a rigorous and persuasive fashion.

## **CLASS TEXTS**

Required: *Crime Films: Investigating the Scene*. Kirsten Moana Thompson: Wallflower: London 2007

Additional readings are available as pdfs and listed on the syllabus as CANVAS. Please print these out and bring to class or have in digital form in class on your tablets or computers ready to discuss each week. Otherwise computers will need to be closed in class.

Generally films will be available on course reserves in the Lemieux Library and some additional or recommended class films are also available via Lemieux Library's streaming Kanopy service [http://primo.seattleu.edu/SEAU:seau\\_rec\\_1:CP71228581550001451](http://primo.seattleu.edu/SEAU:seau_rec_1:CP71228581550001451) (which holds major collections from Criterion, Janus and Kino Lorber) as well as on other major streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime, and for rental from Scarecrow Video (see <http://blog.scarecrow.com/hourslocation/>). Films not available via Kanopy will be on reserve for 4 hour rental in the library. The SU library also enables you to borrow films from other libraries through the SUMMIT interlibrary loan system and from University of Washington.

## **OFFICE HOURS: Tuesdays 1-3, Rm 514 Casey**

I expect everyone to come and see me at least once in the term. Come see me earlier rather than later, and tell me about your expectations for the class and what topics interest you most. Email me if this time is not convenient and we can make another time.

## **EXPECTATIONS AROUND WRITING**

I'm a stickler for details and a tough grader. If you pay attention to details around presentation, spelling and grammar, follow the citation rules precisely, and avoid some common writing problems in film studies (see handouts on Canvas for writing tips, on avoiding common errors like comma splices, apostrophe mistakes and sentence fragments) you will be in good shape to get a C. If you spend time carefully expressing your argument and backing it up with closely observed textual details, you will move your grade up to a B. If you spend time watching the movie a second time, demonstrate individual research and the careful expression of your *own* ideas, you are more likely to move up to an A. We will spend time practicing these skills in class with each week's film.

You are expected to have the ability to write college-level essays with appropriate documentation and formatting. (see <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/> for guidance on MLA style) and to take detailed lecture notes. All written work will also be submitted to Turnitin on Canvas as well as in analogue form to me.

Please see Writing Tips (pdf) on Canvas under Assignments and read it before all assignments. You will be penalized for every 5 spelling or grammatical errors. Consult the Learning center if you are unsure about any of this. (see <https://www.seattleu.edu/learning-assistance/> for more online writing resources, and links to get tutoring help with your assignments)

**COURSEWORK:** short paper 20%; Group Presentation 20 %; Research essay 30 %; attendance & participation 10 %; final test 20%

**Short Paper (20%):** Select a crime film of your own choice but not shown in class as the week's main screening, and with close reference to any aspects of style, narrative structure or aesthetics discuss 1) how it meets the definition of a crime story, and 2) how it explores key themes or issues typical of the crime story. Is the film innovative in its exploration of crime? Does it reinvent the formulas of the crime story in any particular way?

Do not consult other writers or critics on your film: I want to see evidence of your own thinking.

Note: any evidence of plagiarism will be treated with an automatic F.

**Length: 5 pages. Due Date: Jan 21**

**Group Presentation (20%):** I will assign you in 3-4 groups of 5 in Week 2 and select the dates for your presentation. Your group will present on a Thursday in Weeks 4, 5 or 6. Identify a film you consider to be a crime film, and in a 20 minute presentation (any format, from PowerPoint to pecha kucha to film to graphic novel to reenactments) present to the class the ways in which it addresses your Group's specific question on the body, desire or technology (see Group Presentation handout in Assignments folder on Canvas). You will need to 1) clearly define what you mean by "crime film" and 2) present specific concrete textual details from the film (narrative structure, genre elements, style, themes, etc) that demonstrates how your film responds to your topic. You should prepare handouts for the class which lists useful background information on the film. You should also have a written summary of your presentation to hand to me at the time you give your presentation.

**Due Date: Thursday class Jan 26, Feb 2, Feb 9/Weeks 4, 5, & 6**

**Research Essay 8-10 pages, 30 %**

With reference to a one week midterm take home question and one of the weekly recommended home viewing assignments, you will write a research paper on a topic of your own selection, that will be due in class and on Turnitin by **Feb 21**. (Further information TBA on Canvas)

**For all written assignments, the Assessment Criteria will include:**

- Fulfillment of the set task in a clear, direct, relevant, timely, and complete manner
- Clear evidence of engagement with the ideas and materials discussed in lectures and readings
- The originality and quality of your findings. This will include your ability to find, comprehend, explain and synthesize research materials from reputable academic sources, and to develop and express your ideas
- Coherency, structure and argumentation of your essay
- Quality and fluency of your expression
- Understanding and correct application of terms and concepts used in film analysis
- Accurate and complete referencing of all sources, including a bibliography and filmography following MLA In Text citation. (See <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/2/>)

**Final test (20 %):** The exam will be a two hour exam of multiple choice/short answer and several longer essay questions. It will require you to prepare by revising your film notes, readings and lecture notes for Week 1-9. You will also be expected to study a specific number of terms from a glossary of terms and topics (a study sheet to guide your revision will be posted on Canvas by Week 8). **Test Date: March 9**

**Attendance/participation (10%):** This will be split up into two components : attendance (5 points) and participation (5 points ). Attendance is mandatory and will be taken every class; students are allowed one **free absence** with no direct effect on their grade, beyond this each absence will incur a half letter grade penalty. If you only miss one class and arrive to class on time you will get an automatic 5 points. If you are sick or have another reasonable excuse, please bring documentation and this absence will not count against you. Please be punctual to class as lateness will also be reflected in your grade. **Five absences**, including your free absence, results in an automatic course failure. Mere attendance, however, is not adequate and students are expected to actively participate in class discussions, engaging with the course material, the instructor, and classmates in critical but respectful ways. This means being prepared to discuss the material, ask questions and respond to your classmates. It also means not checking your phone or otherwise multitasking in class. Excellent participation will receive a 4-5 out of 5 points; with poor to none receiving 1-2. Average will result in a 3 out of 5.

### **Assignment Protocol**

All written work must be typeset in 12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced, with margins of no more than 1 inch. All papers must have your name on every page, have page numbers and be stapled. All assignments must be submitted to CANVAS/Turnitin online as well as in printed form. Both must be submitted by the due date and time of the class. Penalties of half a grade apply to non submission or late submission on Turnitin.

### **Other Important Things**

Please switch off all cell phones before entering the classroom and close all computers during class. Please remember to address me courteously if you send me emails and don't expect a response faster than 24 hours. (First read this: <https://medium.com/@lportwoodstacer/how-to-email-your-professor-without-being-annoying-af-cf64ae0e4087#.6yhml54r8>). (Please do not walk out in the middle of films, and don't start packing up to leave until the auditorium lights go up.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of the thoughts, words, or ideas of someone other than yourself. An assignment which uses material from any source but does not document it completely and accurately both in the paper itself and on a works cited page will receive a failing grade and may not be revised. If you cut and paste from another's work, this constitutes plagiarism. If you change a few words, but copy the ideas without acknowledgement, this is plagiarism. Whenever you quote from another person's work, you must use quotation marks, and footnotes/or endnotes. If you do not, this is plagiarism.

**GRADING SCALE** (For my expectations for grades, see grade descriptors below)

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

**The “A” paper/presentation** addresses an appropriately complex topic and answers a specific research question. The thesis is clearly presented, and the paper is exceptionally well-organized. The topic and thesis are well-developed with primary and secondary research. The development of the topic and thesis is clear and logical. The reasoning is valid and shows an awareness of the complexities of the topic. Supporting evidence is convincingly presented in coherent and well-organized paragraph.

The “A” paper is free of grammatical and mechanical errors. The style is appropriate for the genre and audience. Sources are correctly cited and documented in MLA style.

**The “B” paper/presentation** addresses a topic competently, but the topic and research question may not be of appropriate complexity. It is well-organized, though the development of the topic and thesis may not be consistently clear. The reasoning may not always be valid and logical with an awareness of the complexities of the topic. Supporting evidence is not always coherently and convincingly presented in well-organized paragraphs. The topic and thesis are developed with primary and secondary sources, but the development may not be thorough or balanced. The paper/presentation competently executes the genre of the assignment (proposal, review of the literature, presentation, researched argument), though some elements may not be clearly presented or completely developed. There may be some grammatical and mechanical errors. The style may not be consistently appropriate for the genre and audience. Sources may not be completely and correctly cited and documented in MLA style.

**The “C” paper/presentation** addresses a topic, but the topic and research question may not be of appropriate complexity for college-level writing. The thesis may be unclear or simplistic. The topic and thesis may not be adequately developed with primary and secondary research. The paper/presentation does not execute the genre of the assignment adequately (proposal, review of the literature, presentation, researched argument). Elements of the genre may be only partially presented or not well-developed. Supporting evidence is not well-organized at the paragraph level. It has a number of grammatical and mechanical errors. The style is often not appropriate for the genre and audience. Sources may not be adequately cited and documented in MLA style. The writer may not be clearly making a distinction between information from sources and ideas in his/her argumentation.

**The “D” paper/presentation** addresses a topic that is too broad or too simple. The thesis may be missing or overly simplistic. The topic and thesis are poorly developed with primary and secondary research. It shows little organization. The development of the topic and thesis may be minimal, and the reasoning may be incoherent. Supporting evidence is not presented or organized coherently at the paragraph level. It has major grammatical and mechanical errors. The style is inappropriate for the genre and audience. The paper may contain plagiarized passages, with little or incorrect citation and documentation in MLA style.

**The "F" paper/presentation** does not address a topic suitable for college-level writing. There is no thesis. The topic and thesis are not developed with primary and secondary research and the paper is completely disorganized. The development of the topic and thesis may follow no discernible order, and the reasoning may not be coherent. Paragraphs are neither coherent nor well-developed. There are numerous and major grammatical and mechanical errors. The style is inappropriate for the genre and audience. The paper may be mostly or completely plagiarized. There is no or rudimentary citation and documentation of sources in MLA style.

## **SYLLABUS**

### **Week I / What is a Crime Film? /The Narrative of Murder I: The Whodunit / Jan 3 & 5**

Introduction to class, Historical Overview of Crime Genre, Murder, Mystery & thriller genres  
Screening: *Dead Again* (Kenneth Branagh, 1991) UK; selection of clips from Agatha Christie and Sherlock Holmes adaptations; *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000)

Readings: Thompson Chapter 1 "Crime As Puzzle: Whodunnits and Heists" (pp 29-48); Andrew Spicer "Raymond Chandler "The Art of Murder" both on Canvas

\*\*\*\*\*As part of your preparation for your first short paper (due Jan 17), come to first tutorial with a specific crime film example to discuss with classmates in light of reading from Week 1 (and be prepared to discuss how it fulfills criteria from reading in Week 1)

Recommended Home Viewing: *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000)

Additional Recommended Readings: GK Chesterton "A Defense of Detective Stories" (Canvas)

### **Week II/ 'Snatched from the Headlines': Crime and History /Jan 10 & 12**

Screening: (clips) *History of a Crime* (Ferdinand Zecca, 1901) France; *Musketeers of Pig Alley* (D.W. Griffith, 1912) US; *Scarface* (Howard Hawks, 1932) US ; *Public Enemy* (William Wellman) US

Screening: *Goodfellas* (Martin Scorsese, 1990) US

Reading: Thompson, Introduction (pp 1-27)

Recommended Home Viewing: *The Godfather* (Francis Coppola, 1972) and *Godfather II* (1975)

### **Jan 14-16 Martin Luther King Holiday. No Classes Monday**

### **Week III / Tartan Noir: Murder amongst friends / Jan 17 & 19**

Screening: *Shallow Grave* (Danny Boyle, 1995), Scotland

Reading: Thompson Chap 2

Recommended Home Viewing: *Oldboy* (Park Chan wook, 2003); *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* (Park Chan Wook, 2005)

### **FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE in class Jan 24**

### **Week IV/ Serial Murder/ Jan 24 & 26**

Screening: *Se7en* (David Fincher, 1996) US

Readings: Thompson, chap 4 "The Criminal II: The Serial Killer Film and Postmodern Hybrids";

Mark Seltzer, "Serial Killing for Beginners" and "The Profile of the Serial Killer" (Canvas)

### **Presentations Group # 1**

Recommended Home Viewing: *Hannibal* (TV Series), *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991);

*Manhunter* (Michael Mann, 1986); *Henry: Portrait of A Serial Killer* (John McNaughton, 1986)

### **Week V/ SERIAL LONG FORM CRIME / Jan 31 & Feb 2**

Screening: *Hannibal*; *Dexter*; *Breaking Bad* (selections);  
Readings: Selections, "Scene of the Crime" from *The Forensic Science of CSI* (Canvas)

### **Presentations Group # 2**

Recommended Home Viewing: Nordic Noir and *The Bridge/Broen/Bron*, Sweden/Denmark; *The Killing* (US)/*Forbrydelsen* (Denmark); *Hannibal*; *Dexter* (*select your own episodes*)

### **Week VI / Southern Gothic and the Law/ Feb. 7 & 9**

Screenings: *Cape Fear* (Martin Scorsese, 1991)  
Readings: Thompson "Cape Fear and Trembling: Familial Dread" Canvas  
Preparation for Research paper; textual analysis of *Cape Fear*  
Recommended Home Viewing: *Night of the Hunter* (Charles Laughton, 1955)

### **Presentations Group # 3**

### **Week VII/ True Life Crime and Murder in the Family /Feb 14 & 16. Happy Valentines Day!**

Screening: *Heavenly Creatures* (Peter Jackson, 1994) NZ  
Reading: Selections, *Parker and Hulme*, Glamuzina, CANVAS pdf  
Recommended Viewing: *In Cold Blood* (Richard Brooks, 1967), *Capote* (Bennett Miller, 2005) US  
**Midterm Take home Research essay given out in class (due one week later)**

### **WEEK VIII/Film Noir & Neo Noir / Feb. 21 & 23**

Screening: *Blood Simple* (Joel & Ethan Coen, 1984); selections, Martin Scorsese Documentary on Film Noir  
Reading: "The Background to Film Noir" Andrew Spicer, Canvas  
Recommended Home Viewing: *The Grifters* (Stephen Frears, 1990); *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947)

### **RESEARCH PAPER DUE**

### **Week IX / Bad Couples/ Feb 28 & March 2**

Screening: *Badlands* (Terence Malick, 1973); clips *Gun Crazy* (Joseph Lewis, 1949); *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967)  
Readings: Stephen Prince "Graphic Violence in the Cinema: Origins, Aesthetic Design, and Social Effects" Canvas  
Recommended Home Viewing: *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967)

### **Week X/ Final Test/March 7 & 9**

March 7: Class Prep  
March 9: In Class Test

### **Last Day of All classes March 13**

---

### **General Course and University Policies**

#### **SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

If you have, or think you may have, a disability (including an "invisible disability" such as a learning disability, a chronic health problem, or a mental health condition) that interferes with your performance as a student in this class, you are encouraged to arrange support services and/or accommodations through Disabilities Services staff located in Loyola 100, (206) 296-5740. Disability-based adjustments to course expectations can be arranged only through this process.

## CELL PHONES, LAPTOPS, AND RECORDING DEVICES

So that we can all stay focused and get the most from our time in class, all cell phones – including my own – must be turned off except when in use for class activities or by prior agreement. (For instance, if you're the primary caregiver for someone, a relative or close friend of someone who's critically ill in hospital, or an expectant birth partner, please let me know so that we can make a suitable arrangement.) There may be a few opportunities during class to use your laptops and I will let you know when these occur. If you want to use a laptop, other mobile device, or recording device in class at any other time, you need to ask for permission in advance. There are very few instances where I will agree (such as an accommodation through Disability Services), and there are good reasons for this. Good note-taking skills are vital for you in your future careers: You can't always rely on technology being available, can't expect to be given prepared summaries or notes, nor can you afford the time to write everything long-hand. It's important that when you graduate, you have some good note-taking techniques and can differentiate essential facts from background information during a discussion. We will also discuss this in class. Using laptops can be a distraction, both for other students and for the instructor. The temptation to attempt to "multi-task" using technology in class can also be enormous, but to do so would be extremely discourteous to the entire class, and would be a waste of your own learning opportunity.

Seattle University Statement on Academic Honesty: "Seattle University is committed to the principle that academic honesty and integrity are important values in the educational process. Violations of academic honesty include, but are not limited to, acts of plagiarism, cheating, submitting false data, submitting work for multiple purposes, and falsifying academic documentation. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense against the academic community. Acts of academic dishonesty will be addressed according to the [Academic Honesty Policy](#)."

### For those who have never taken Art of Film

Any one of these textbooks are excellent (any edition)

*Looking At Movies*, Richard Barsam. (New York: Norton, 2009). Comes with 2 DVDs and booklet on Writing about Movies

*Film Art; An Introduction*, David Bordwell & Kristin Thompson. New York: McGraw-Hill.

*Understanding Movies* Louis Giannetti (Prentice Hall: NJ) 2007,

*The Film Experience; An Introduction*, Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White (Bedford/St Martin's: New York) 2008.

For more information, especially on technical equipment and formal terms consult

Ira Konigsberg. *The Complete Film Dictionary*, Penguin: New York, 1997.

For more information on specific film personnel—actors, directors cinematographers, etc. (especially of the historical period) consult

Ephraim Katz *The Film Encyclopedia: The Complete Guide to Film and the Film Industry*. New York: Collins, latest edition.

Or David Thomson's *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film*. New York: Knopf, latest edition.

### For those who love special effects

Patricia Netzley. *Encyclopedia of Movie Special Effects*. New York: Checkmark, 2001.

(I recommend buying yourself Katz and Konigsberg as standard reference texts in film studies).

Also remember to use imdb.com (Internet movie Database)