English 3364: Special Topics in Popular Culture: True Crime and Literary Violence

Prof. Elizabeth Hewitt (hewitt.33@osu.edu) TTh 2:20-3:40 in Journalism 0371
Office: Denney 530 | Office Hours: Wednesdays, noon to 2 pm, and by appointment

This course will study the long and varied tradition of true crime narratives.
• We will investigate the changes and continuities in the literary representation of violent crime.
• We will consider the ways that crime can be read as symptomatic of particular cultural moments and anxieties.
• We will think about the reasons that crime literature has historically been associated with popular (or lowbrow) culture and yet how it is also motivated by the same aims as Aristotelian tragedy, which is catharsis.
• We will think metacritically about true crime, asking how true crime writers understand their literary project in relation to crime as investigators, as criminals, as prosecutors, and as victims.
• We will ask what accounts for the longstanding popularity of literature about human violence?

This course fulfills General Education: Culture and Ideas.

Goals: Students evaluate significant cultural phenomena and ideas in order to develop capacities for aesthetic and historical response and judgment; and interpretation and evaluation.

Learning Outcomes: 1) Students analyze and interpret major forms of human thought, culture, and expression; 2) Students evaluate how ideas influence the character of human beliefs, the perception of reality, and the norms that guide human behavior.

Course Requirements:
• **Quizzes.** To make sure that you are keeping up with the reading, there will be four quizzes, which will be taken on Carmen. The cumulative average will constitute 25% of your grade.
• **Regular and engaged attendance.** If you miss more than 3 classes, your grade will be lowered one full grade for each class missed. There is no need to submit excuses for absences, as the same policy applies regardless of the reason for missing class. You should bring your text and writing materials/laptop to every class, and you should also come prepared with notes and questions on the readings. Participation in course discussion is encouraged, and for those who are more reticent about public conversation, there will be a discussion board on Carmen to facilitate our conversation. Both in-class and Carmen participation will constitute 10% of your grade.
• **Papers.** Although the course is not a writing-intensive one, I would like you to write two short (500-750 word) essays. The first of these short papers will be due on (or before) Friday, February 1. The second will be due on (or before) Friday, March 8. Each will be worth 20% of your grade. More specific guidelines are located on Carmen (under Content), Paper Assignments.
• **Final Paper.** Your final assignment will be a longer essay or research project, which will be due on Friday, April 26, and will be worth 25% of your grade.
• **All course assignments must be completed to earn credit for this course.**

Academic misconduct and plagiarism
Plagiarism is the representation of another’s works or ideas as one’s own. It includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person’s work, and/or
the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas. All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. If COAM determines that you have violated the University’s Code of Student Conduct, the sanctions for the violation could include a failing grade in this course and suspension or dismissal from the University. For more information see the section “Prohibited conduct” at http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp.

Accessibility
The Office for Disability Services, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact the ODS at 292-3307, or visit http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/.

Laptop/Tablet/E-reader/Cellphones
You are allowed to use laptops, tablets and electronic readers (kindles, nooks) in class so long as you are using them to take notes or look at class material. Please have respect for your colleagues and me and do not play games, surf, tweet, instant message, facebook, &c. And please turn off the ringers on your phones.

Required Texts:
Harold Schechter, True Crime: An American Anthology (Library of America | 1598530313)
Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell, From Hell (Top Shelf Productions | 0958578346)
Truman Capote, In Cold Blood (Vintage | 0679745580)
Vincent Bugliosi, Helter Skelter (Norton | 0393322238)
Joe McGinniss, Fatal Vision (Signet | 0451165667)
Janet Malcom, The Journalist and the Murderer (Vintage | 0679731830)
James Ellroy, My Dark Places (Vintage | 0679762051)

Class Schedule:
Crime and Punishment in Early America
1/8: Introductions
1/10: “Pillars of Salt” (TC, 3-35); “A Faithful Narrative of the Wicked Life of Patience Boston” (C); “A Faithful Narrative of Elizabeth Wilson” (C)

Sensational Violence and the Modern Media
1/15: “Words and Dying Confession of Samuel Frost” (C); “Account of a Murder by J____ Y______” (TC, 39-44); James Beadle (C); Timothy Dwight, “A crime more atrocious” (TC, 45-51)
1/17: Bennett, “The Recent Tragedy” (TC, 63-68); Rick Geary, The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers (C); Edgar Allan Poe, “Murder of Marie Roget” (C)
1/22: Jesse Harding Pomeroy, the Boy Fiend” (TC, 98-116); Celia Thaxter, “A Memorable Murder” (TC 131-155)
1/24: A. J. Liebling, “The Case of the Scattered Dutchman” (TC 467-511)
Quiz 1

Celebrity Crime and Artistic Violence
1/29: Alan Moore, From Hell
1/31: From Hell (continued)
2/5:   From Hell (continued); Primary documents about Whitechapel case (C)
2/7:   Murder Ballads (TC, 198-207); More Murder Songs (C); Damon Runyon, “The Eternal Blonde” (TC, 235-302)

The Low and High Brows of True Crime
2/12:  Edmund Pearson, “Hell Benders” (TC 217-234); Truman Capote, In Cold Blood
2/14:   In Cold Blood (continued)
2/19:   In Cold Blood (continued); James Thurber, “A Sort of Genius” (TC 392-406)
2/21:   Jim Thompson, “Ditch of Doom” (TC 375-91); Elizabeth Hardwick, “The Life and Death of Caryl Chessman” (TC 536-48)
        Quiz 2
2/26:   “Eight Girls, All Pretty, All Nurses, All Slain” (TC, 578-609); Selections from true crime pulp magazines and comics from the 30s and 40s (C)
2/28:   no class

Celebrity Criminals and their Authors
3/5:   Vincent Bugliosi, Helter Skelter
3/7:    Helter Skelter (continued)
3/12:  no class (spring break)
3/14:  no class (spring break)
3/19:  Truman Capote, “Then It All Came Down” (TC, 651-61); Gay Talese, “Charlie Manson’s Home on the Range” (TC, 638-50); Jeffrey MacDonald, Fatal Vision
3/21:   Fatal Vision (continued)
        Quiz 3
3/26:   Fatal Vision (continued); Janet Malcom, The Journalist and the Murderer
3/28:   The Journalist and the Murderer (continued)
4/2:    The Journalist and the Murderer (continued); Jimmy Breslin, “Son of Sam” (TC 662-67)
4/4:    Don Moser, “The Pied Piper of Tucson” (TC 610-26); Joyce Carol Oates, “Where are you going, where have you been?” (C)
        Quiz 4
4/9:    Jack Webb, “The Black Dahlia”; “The Black Dahlia Website” (C); James Ellroy, My Dark Places
4/11:   My Dark Places (continued)
4/16:   My Dark Places (continued)
4/18:   Conclusions