Freshman Seminar  
**Global Crime Fiction: Tackling Crime, Corruption, and Social Disintegration**  
Enrollment limited to 15

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Office: Asia Center, CGIS S222, 1730 Cambridge Street  
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**Course Description**

Crime fiction is one of literature’s most popular genres, with hundreds of millions of fans across the globe. Both local and foreign crime fiction, the latter often in translation, flies off the shelves from Boston to Barcelona to Beijing and beyond, regardless of whether the novel takes place in a small Swedish village or in multiple cosmopolitan megacities. Why is this? Part of it is in the storytelling. Who can resist a gripping whodunit with unexpected twists and turns and often with an appealing investigator or detective (professional or amateur), particularly if everything is resolved at the end, and often in ways we least expect? But part of the appeal of crime fiction is also the insights this genre can offer into some of the most significant challenges facing societies globally.

In this course we will read a selection of bestselling crime fiction from the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. We will be most concerned with what this literature tells us about investigating, exposing, and potentially ameliorating historical crimes, environmental crimes, corruption in criminal justice, and social disintegration, particularly as these involve injustices inflicted on marginalized and otherwise vulnerable individuals and communities, people targeted on account of their class, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexuality and other factors. Secondary readings and class discussion will provide the necessary cultural and literary contexts for these readings.

**Prerequisites**

The only prerequisite for this course is a desire to read widely a range of thrilling, provocative works from around the world that tackle some of the most significant problems facing societies globally. No non-English language expertise required, but students who can read a novel in the original language are encouraged to do so.

**Academic Integrity and Honor Policy**

You are expected to follow standard citation practice and properly cite all books, articles, websites, lectures, and other sources that you use in your work. You must also acknowledge any feedback you have received on drafts.

This course supports the Harvard Honor Code: Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the
scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one’s own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

**Expectations about preparation**

You must complete the readings for each meeting before the meeting. Primary sources (the novels) are available on reserve in Lamont. They are also for sale at the COOP and on abebooks.com, often quite cheaply. Most of the secondary readings are available online via Hollis. Those that are not will be provided as PDFs.

**Grading**

This Freshman Seminar is graded SAT/USAT. Attendance is required. If you must miss a class, you are required to contact Professor Thornber in advance. Two or more unexcused absences put you at risk of failing the course. Only religious and medical absences are excused. You must complete all requirements in order to pass the course. Without approved arrangements with Professor Thornber prior to the due date, late submissions will be marked down (e.g., A to A-; A- to B+ and so on) per day late.

- Class attendance and participation – 30%
- Brief Presentation – 20% (you will be expected to submit the paper on which your presentation is based [4-5 pp.], the weeks following the presentation)
- Midterm Paper – 20% (6-7 pp.)
- Final Project – 30% (This can be a paper [10-12 pp.] or a creative project)

**Electronics** – Laptops, iPads, iPhones, and other electronic devices are not permitted in class. This is because 1) they are distracting to your classmates; 2) they can be distracting to you; 3) taking notes with paper and pen allows you to process material more effectively than taking notes with electronic devices. If there is a particular medical reason that requires you to take notes on an electronic device you must speak with Professor Thornber in advance.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1 – Beginnings (no assigned readings)**

- Introduction to crime fiction and its primary genres; Sophocles and *Oedipus the King*;
- Eighteenth-century Chinese *gong’an* crime novels; Dutch diplomat Robert van Gulik, Judge Dee, Amazing Detective Di Renjie; crime fiction around the world today.

**Week 2 – Exposing Historical Crimes 1 – War Crimes**
Christian von Ditfurth (Germany), *A Paragon of Virtue* (Mann ohne Makel, 2002)

Katharina Hall, “Historical Crime Fiction in German: The Turbulent Twentieth Century,” in Katharina Hall, ed., *Crime Fiction in German: Der Krimi* [on course website]

**Week 3 – Exposing Historical Crimes 2 – Colonialism and Complicity**

Didier Daeninckx (France), *Murder in Memorium* (Meurtres pour mémoire, 1984)


**Week 4 – Exposing Historical Crimes 3 – Working through the Past**

Yasmina Khadra (Algeria), *Dead Man’s Share* (La Part du Mort, 2009)


**Week 5 – Exposing Environmental Crimes 1 – Ecocriticism and Globalization**

Deon Meyer (South Africa), *Blood Safari* (Onsigbaar, 2007)


**Week 6 – Exposing Environmental Crimes 2 – Environmental Justice and Sexuality**


Katie Hogan, “Detecting Toxic Environments: Gay Mystery as Environmental Justice,” in Rachel Stein, ed., *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality, and Activism*, 249-61) [available online via Hollis].

**Week 7 – Exposing Environmental Crimes 3 – Poverty and Place**

Kerstin Ekman (Sweden), *Blackwater* (Händelser vid vatten, 1993)


****Midterm Paper Due (6-8 pp.)****
Week 8 – Exposing Corruption in Criminal Justice 1 – Wrongful Convictions 1

He Jiahong (China), *Hanging Devils: Hong Jun Investigates* (Xue zhi zui, 2010)


Week 9 – Exposing Corruption in Criminal Justice 2 – Wrongful Convictions 2

Kishwar Desai (India), *Witness the Night* (2009)

Rashmi Dube Bhatnagar et al., *Female Infanticide in India*, 1-27 [available online via Hollis]

Week 10 – Exposing Corruption in Criminal Justice 3 – Misogyny and Harassment

Nonami Asa (Japan), *Hunter* (Kogoeru kiba, 1996)

Amanda Seaman, *Bodies of Evidence*, 57-85 [available online via Hollis]

****Abstract of Final Project Due (1-2 pp.)

Week 11 – Exposing Social Disintegration 1 – Enabling Crime


Week 12 – Exposing Social Disintegration 2 – Converting to Crime

José Latour (Cuba), *Outcast* (1999)


Optional: Meja Mwangi (Kenya), *Kill Me Quick* (1973)

Week 13 – Final Project Presentations