



Instructor: Maggie O'Leary  
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 Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:15-11:15 AM

### **Class Information**

Meeting place: Goldwin Smith Hall 236  
 CRN: 17784  
 Section: 105  
 Meeting time: 8:40-9:55 AM T/R

### **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

- 📖 *Alias Grace*—Margaret Atwood
- 📖 *Fargo*—Joel and Ethan Cohen
- 📖 *The Big Lebowski*—Cohen[s]
- 📖 “Cat Among the Pigeons” from  
ITV’s *Poirot*—Mark Gatiss
- 📖 *The Thin Man*—W.S. Van Dyke
- 📖 *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*—Dan Goor and  
Michael Schur
- 📖 *Never Let Me Go*—Kazuo Ishiguro
- 📖 *Serial*—Koenig and Glass
- 📖 *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*—Gabriel  
Garcia Marquez
- 📖 *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*—Edgar  
Allen Poe

Texts are available for purchase through the Cornell Bookstore, Amazon, &etc. Films and episodes are available through the course reserve for this class on Blackboard. Podcast episodes are available to stream through iTunes.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

As a narrative—or something that tells us a story in a particular way—mysteries have in turns fascinated, frustrated, excited, and disturbed readers and viewers precisely because we seek answers for questions, and these answers often prove elusive to us. In this FWS, we will examine texts and offer our own reflections on what constitutes a mystery, what a mystery may accomplish that other genres may not, and how the mystery continues to shape and be shaped by the world we inhabit and the systems in which we are beholden to and participate. As we encounter these texts, we will also pursue in our own writing how to

thoughtfully and critically read a text, respond to that text, support these responses with evidence, learn to revise our thinking, and, as this is an English class, also how to read these texts creatively and critically. To this effect, studying the mystery will expose us to our own perceptual limitations, assist us in thinking precisely and with attention to detail, and will encourage us to question our own underlying assumptions.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- 🕒 Learn to close-read and analyze a variety of texts (print, film, and otherwise)
- 🕒 Practice and test our abilities as writers in a number of different contexts and assignments—these will include in-class responses, weekly critical responses, group writing, and several revised essays
- 🕒 Learn how to write ethically and with respect to the minds and ideas of others, avoiding plagiarism and other forms of intellectual and academic dishonesty
- 🕒 Effectively organize a longer essay to produce a cohesive, polished argument
- 🕒 Learn different modes of argumentation and provide appropriate and sufficient evidence for the claims we make
- 🕒 Learn and identify the aspects of what constitutes a narrative—its common forms, tropes, and how these expectations may be subverted
- 🕒 Enter into an ongoing conversation by engaging with primary and secondary research sources
- 🕒 Establish standards for academic discourse and participation through in-class discussion, peer evaluation, and collaborative assignments

### **THE BASICS:**

**Papers:** Expectations for each writing assignment will be made explicit on the according assignment sheets—look to your assignment sheets for answers before emailing me. Essays must be typed, formatted, and documented according to MLA standards for written work. Due dates are made explicit in the syllabus and on assignment sheets. Failure to turn in any of the written assignments will affect your grade significantly, and you cannot pass this class if you do not turn in first *and* final drafts of each essay. We will be using our Google Drive folder for all essay and written submissions, so your papers will need to be submitted to your file in our shared Google Drive folder. I will use Google Drive because Blackboard/Canvas is the literal worst.

**Workshops:** You will be required to workshop your rough draft of your final essay with your peers. A workshop will take place the day your draft is due and is a required aspect of the drafting process. As such, workshopping this draft will figure into your final grade for the essay as a whole—if you miss peer review, it will negatively affect this grade.

**Conferences:** You will be expected to attend two 20-minute conferences throughout the course of the semester to discuss ongoing writing assignments and your work in class. These will be held during the fifth and fourteenth weeks of the course, and sign-ups will be circulated the week before.

**Office hours and contacting me:** My office hours are Tuesday mornings from 10:15 AM to 11:15 AM and are held in Goldwin Smith 340. I am also open to making appointments with students who have scheduling conflicts with my posted hours. My email address is mo433@cornell.edu. This is the best way to contact me, as I check it frequently and will respond to queries from students as quickly as I can. As a rule, however, I do not check my email after six in the evenings during the weekday, and do so less frequently over the weekend. Please allow for 24 hours to respond to you before you send a follow-up email.

**Late work:** All work should be completed by the due dates made explicit in this syllabus and on your assignment sheets. As a rule, I do not accept late work in the absence of extenuating circumstances. It is your responsibility to have all materials ready for each class meeting. Assignments turned in after the due date (meaning the class meeting) will be deducted a full letter grade for *every day* they are late. You *must* turn in your first draft. ***I will not grade a final essay that did not go through the drafting process, and I will not grade a final essay if you did not turn in a first draft.*** If you are ill or need to miss class the day any written work is due, you must email the work to me before the class meets. I am open to granting extensions, but you need to contact me at least 48 hours before the final due date. If you miss a workshop, you will be required to show me that each member of your peer group has added comments to your file in Drive. In the event of something significant (e.g. prolonged or sudden family illness, emergencies, etc), please contact me and we will proceed appropriately. **I will not chase after you about missed or late assignments.**

**A note on incompletes:** Because this course is collaborative and based heavily upon process and revision, turning in a significant portion of work after the end of the semester is difficult for you and for me. In other words, I will not grant requests for incompletes except for in very rare circumstances. As always, however, come talk to me.

**A note on plagiarism:** I expect all work turned in to be the original work of each student. Do not submit work that is not your own in both conception and execution. Do not submit work that was completed for another class. Plagiarism in this class is grounds for immediate failure, and if it becomes a problem also grounds for expulsion from the university. If you have questions about proper documentation and citation methods, please see me or set up an appointment with a consultant in the Writing Center.

**Technology policy:** Excessive phone use in my class is more of an annoyance than it is productive, so please refrain from doing so. We will be spending substantial time every class on group work and workshopping, so I encourage you to use your laptops and tablets for note-taking, writing, and in-class revisions. If they become a problem, however (and I can always tell if they do), I reserve the right to ask that they be put away for any given class period. Also: I do not allow photographs to be taken in my classroom unless I am aware that the photo is being taken and I have given my explicit permission for you to do so. I do not allow video recordings in my class to that same effect. It's a little creepy, even if it's meant to be endearing/for the Vine (or TikTok, RIP Vine).

**Disability statement:** Please see me during the first week of class if you have a documented disability and I will be happy to make accommodations. Your access in this course is important. Please give me your Student Disability Services (SDS) accommodation letter early in the semester

so that we have adequate time to arrange your approved academic accommodations. If you need an immediate accommodation for equal access, please speak with me after class or send an email message to me and/or SDS at [sds\\_cu@cornell.edu](mailto:sds_cu@cornell.edu). If the need arises for additional accommodations during the semester, please contact SDS and keep me apprised of anything that comes up for you. SDS is located on level 5 of Cornell Health, 607-254-4545, [sds@cornell.edu](mailto:sds@cornell.edu).

**Title IX statement:** As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment for my students and for the campus as a whole. Please be aware that as a faculty member, I have the responsibility to report any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about sexual harassment, sexual violence, or discrimination with a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, please contact the Victim Advocacy Program here at Cornell, 607-255-1212, [victimadvocate@cornell.edu](mailto:victimadvocate@cornell.edu).

**Basic Needs Security:** Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable doing so. This will enable me to direct you towards any resources that I may possess.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION:

In order to pass this class to your and my satisfaction, your efforts must reflect a willingness to engage with class material and requirements at a level consistent with your own educational goals. In other words, you are your grade, and I evaluate your work. To break this down so you know what you may expect from me:

- 🕒 **B-level work** will include final written work of satisfactory quality, including participation, depth, and thoroughness in your contributions to your workshop group and the class as a whole. You attended all workshops and conferences and enthusiastically participated in all aspects of the writing process, from invention to preliminary drafts culminating in a thoroughly revised, well-developed final draft that has been submitted in accordance to set deadlines. You have also completed all homework assignments on time and in accordance with assigned requirements. Additionally, you will have completed each component part of your essay assignments in a timely and satisfactory manner.
- 🕒 **A-level work** will include all of the elements and specifications required of a B-level project, but with a pronounced excellence in quality. There will be evidence of a deep and thorough engagement with assignments and subject matter throughout the term. Your in-class participation has been consistent, topical and productive, and you will have demonstrated a marked interest in learning from the class and your classmates, and in improving as a writer and thinker.
- 🕒 **C-level work** will include a mix of satisfactory and unsatisfactory quality in written work and throughout the writing process, including first and final drafts of your essays and their component parts. Your in-class participation is sporadic.
- 🕒 **D-level work** (or below) will include written work of unsatisfactory quality, a marked lack of participation, and an unsatisfactory engagement or a failure to engage with the writing process.

### ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (30% OF YOUR FINAL GRADE):

You cannot expect to succeed in this class without attending regularly and participating in class (either individually or in groups). To that effect, I will allow you two absences, no explanations necessary, as I recognize that life is messy and unpredictable. Absences in excess of this number will lower your final grade—more than five will result in failure of the class. If you miss more than three class meetings, it will lower your grade significantly (half a letter grade). You must attend conferences—failure to do so will qualify as two absences. Participation will be assessed based on your contributions to in-class discussions and group work in addition to your preparedness for class—including coming to class with all assigned work finished and all reading completed. When online reading is required, you will be expected to print copies of each reading/have annotated copies ready on your laptop or tablet, as we will be using them in class. If you arrive to class more than fifteen minutes late, you will be considered absent and lose points for that day. If you must miss class due to participation in a university-sponsored athletic event, religious observances, or an emergency, please contact me in advance to be certain of my requirements for make-up work. Make-up work will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

### WRITTEN WORK (70% OF YOUR FINAL GRADE):

Written work for this course will consist of four essays and a creative project. For each essay, you will develop an arguable thesis and provide sufficient evidence to support that central claim, with an emphasis on revision and final polish. Of these four essays, three will undergo extensive revision. Essays should be submitted (in first and final draft) to your Drive folder. For workshopping, you should be prepared to respond to your peers' drafts in Drive. All essays must be uploaded to Drive on or before the time designated on your assignment sheet, the day they are due.

- 2-3 page ungraded film/story response (0%) | Due in Drive: Sunday, January 27<sup>th</sup>
- 1-2 page poem analysis (5%) | Due in Drive: Sunday, February 10<sup>th</sup>
- 4-5 page novel analysis (15%) | Draft due in Drive: Tuesday, February 19<sup>th</sup> | Final due in Drive: Sunday, February 24<sup>th</sup>
- 4-6 page argumentative essay (15%) | Draft due in Drive: Tuesday, March 12<sup>th</sup> | Final due in Drive: Sunday, March 17<sup>th</sup>
- 6-8 page research essay (20%) | Proposal due in Drive: Friday, April 12<sup>th</sup> | Draft due in Drive: Tuesday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> | Final due in Drive: Sunday, April 28<sup>th</sup>
- 5-6 page creative project (15%) | Final due in Drive: Monday, May 13<sup>th</sup>

### MY PHILOSOPHY:

- ☞ I believe in messy first drafts, and I believe that the strength of our writing reveals itself in revision, rather than an anxious struggle to produce a perfect first draft.
- ☞ I believe in writing assignments that are ambitious in process, but not in scope. I do not assign very long essays, and because of this, I want to emphasize the importance of developing skills and moving beyond what you are comfortable with in your own writing.
- ☞ When I refer to “process,” I want to encourage you to think about writing as something that emerges from sustained hard work, rather than spurts of inspiration or innate brilliance.

- ☯ To that effect, I believe that every student possesses the ability to develop into mature, effective writers. With practice, and with lots of reading, you *will* improve—it’s unavoidable.
- ☯ I believe that writing is a social act. Social in that you are joining an ongoing conversation with other writers, but social also in the sense that you must share your writing with others to truly understand how your writing is received and how you may improve. Your work and your intellectual development needs to be shared with me and with your peers.
- ☯ I believe that writing is meant to be challenging, disruptive, and is meant to expose writers and readers to some vulnerability or dissonance. Learning how to create a productive, critically energetic piece of writing means that you need to learn how to create this kind of experience for a reader, in a mature and open manner.

**This syllabus is subject to change and I may revisit due dates, assignment requirements, or reading schedules based on adjustments to workloads or to allow more time for us to spend on different aspects of our learning process.**

### COURSE CALENDAR

#### **Question: What Does Genre Mean?**

##### ☯ Week One

- Tuesday 1/22: Introductions; what makes a perfect crime
- Thursday 1/24: Todorov, “The Typology of Detective Fiction”; Doyle, “A Study in Scarlet”; *Sherlock* S1 Ep1, “A Study in Pink”; **essay #1 assigned**

##### ☯ Week Two

- Tuesday 1/29: Van Dyke, *The Thin Man*; Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder”
- Thursday 1/31: *The X-Files*, “Bad Blood”

#### **Question: How Do We Confront the Unfamiliar?**

##### ☯ Week Three

- Tuesday 2/5: Freud, “The Uncanny”; Poe, “The Raven”; **essay #2 assigned**
- Thursday 2/7: Poe, “The Black Cat”; pre-writings; **essay #3 assigned**

##### ☯ Week Four:

- Tuesday 2/12: *Never Let Me Go* Ch. 1-6
- Thursday 2/14: *Never Let Me Go* Ch. 7-11

##### ☯ Week Five: Conferences

- Tuesday 2/19: *Never Let Me Go* Ch. 8-11; draft workshop
- Thursday 2/21: No class; conferences

## Question: What—or Who—Can We Trust?

### 📅 Week Six:

- Tuesday 2/26: No class; February Break
- Thursday 2/28: Booth, “Unreliable Narrators”; *Alias Grace* Ch. 1-5; **essay #4 assigned**

### 📅 Week Seven:

- Tuesday 3/5: *Alias Grace* Ch. 6-11
- Thursday 3/7: *Alias Grace* Ch. 12-16

### 📅 Week Eight:

- Tuesday 3/12: *Alias Grace* 17-20; draft workshop
- Thursday 3/14: *Alias Grace* Ch. 21-26

### 📅 Week Nine:

- Tuesday 3/19: *Alias Grace* Ch. 27-31
- Thursday 3/21: *Alias Grace* Ch. 32-37

### 📅 Week Ten:

- Tuesday 4/2: No class; Spring Break
- Thursday 4/4: No class; Spring Break

### 📅 Week Eleven:

- Tuesday 4/9: *Alias Grace* Ch. 38-59; **essay #5 assigned**
- Thursday 4/11: *Alias Grace* Ch. 53-Afterword

### 📅 Week Twelve:

- Tuesday 4/16: Marquez, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* Part 1
- Thursday 4/18: Marquez, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* Part 2; Library visit

### 📅 Week Thirteen:

- Tuesday 4/23: Marquez, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* Part 3; draft workshop
- Thursday 4/25: *Serial*, Season 1, Eps. 1-8; **essay #6 assigned**

## Question: What is Funny, and What is Ridiculous?

### 📅 Week Fourteen: Conferences

- Tuesday 4/30: Cohen[s], *The Big Lebowski*; *Fargo*
- Thursday 5/2: No class; conferences

### 📅 Week Fifteen:

- Tuesday 5/7: Schur & Goor, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (“Moo Moo,” “9 Days,” “Halloween II,” “Terry Kitties”)