

# BLOOD WILL HAVE BLOOD: CRIMES IN LITERATURE



Instructors: Michael Amey and Rachel Martin

Email: [mamey@nvcc.edu](mailto:mamey@nvcc.edu); [rrmartin@nvcc.edu](mailto:rrmartin@nvcc.edu)

Phone: (207) 554-0770 (This is Mike's cell phone)

Office: Bisdorf / AA 0252

Location: Bisdorf 275

Meeting times: Thursdays 2:30 –4:00

Blog: <https://thespoilers.blog/> This is a work in progress. The instructors will be publishing their own stuff here as well as material relevant to the books under discussion.

“The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic.”

— G.K. Chesterton, *The Blue Cross: A Father Brown Mystery*

“The man who has a conscience suffers whilst acknowledging his sin. That is his punishment.”

— Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*

And the poor wretch in the dock. He is stunted and ugly and forlorn. He has committed a crime. His whole being seems to radiate criminality. He looks the thing he is accused of being. People frown and glance away. And yet society has made the wretch what he is, exactly as society has made the Judge what he is. And not satisfied with making him the wretch he is, society is punishing him for being what he is, exactly as society is rewarding the Judge for being what he is.

John Daniel Barry, "Prisoners of Prejudice", *Reactions and Other Essays Discussing Those States of Feeling and Attitude of Mind That Find Expression In Our Individual Qualities*

## Course Description

### **General Course Purpose**

Teaches students to use close readings of literary texts as a springboard for discussion about history, psychology, sociology and the human condition.

### **.Course Prerequisites/Co-requisites**

A willingness to read books and talk about them.

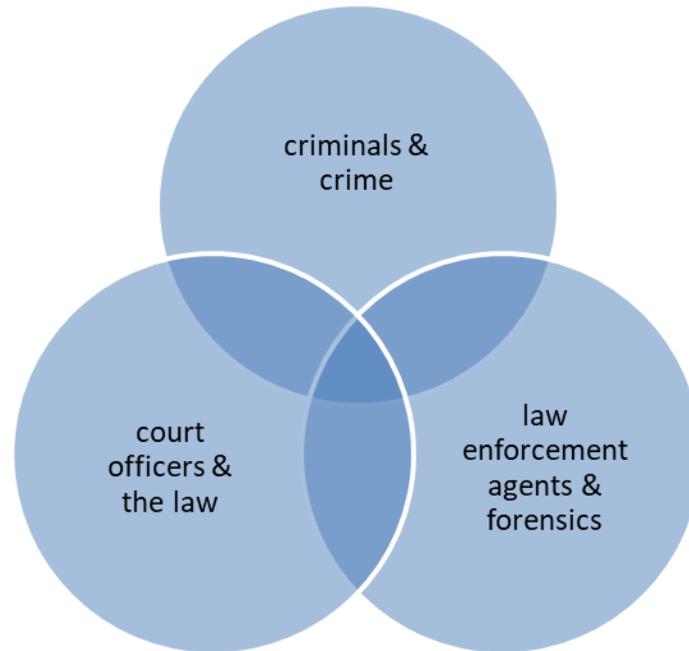
### **Course Objectives**

The primary objectives of the course are:

- 1) to engender in students an appreciation of literature and its role in illuminating, mirroring and transforming society;
- 2) to teach students how to use literary theory and reading strategies to explore literature;
- 3) to familiarize students with terminology used to discuss literature and the conventions used to write about literature;
- 4) to help students discover the connections between literature and other academic disciplines;
- 5) to develop and foster in students the ability to think critically and to express their ideas cogently

One of the great catalysts for Western narratives (literature, television, cinema) and philosophy has been a concern with the nature of the law, those who break it, and those who enforce it. The legal apparatus of most, if not all, countries is specifically and intentionally constructed to confine specific bodies, and in European and American nations has been used by white, patriarchal society to control black and/or other men of color, women, and/or lower socioeconomic classes. Systematic racism and patriarchy are held in place and codified by the legal system, denying certain voices and confining certain, specific identities. We should interrogate the direct connection between power structures, privilege, and targeted oppression in the legal system, and the ways in which the authors and books we will read this semester address or do not address this issue. We

will be examining the stylistics of these texts (how they are constructed, their aesthetic value), theoretical approaches to the texts (ways of reading and interpreting them) and the relevance of the texts (what they offer us in terms of critical perspectives on our socio-historical setting). Discussions, in particular, will focus on various aspects of these three interacting components:



With these areas of interest in mind, we will want to consider the following questions:

- 1) What is the law, how are laws created and why is law necessary? What should we make of Thoreau's assertion:

*I heartily accept the motto,—“That government is best which governs least;” and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which I also believe,—“That government is best which governs not at all;” and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient.*  
—Thoreau, Civil Disobedience

Do laws stem from what John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and others referred to as the social contract, and, if so, are they a “necessary evil”? Is James Madison right in asserting that, “But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary”?

- 2) Are there laws – moral laws – that exist independently of society? In other words, is Immanuel Kant on to something when he asserts, “Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe, the more often and the more intensely the

mind of thought is drawn to them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me”? How about Martin Luther King’s distinction between just and unjust laws, in which he identifies just laws as eternal:

*Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law.*

What is justice?

- 3) What makes a criminal a criminal? Are crimes a consequence, as Marx would have it, of class conflict? Keep in mind that Marx believed that the law was utilized by the ruling class to keep other classes at a disadvantage. Does this view resonate with property laws? With the “war on drugs”? With the notion of “illegals”? Or does crime result, as Freud would have it, from deep-seated, unresolved psychological problems? What responsibility, if any, does society have on the creation of a criminal class, or are criminals alone responsible? One might think of the previous question as a more complex restatement of whether nature (one’s essence) or nurture (one’s environment) plays a bigger role. Are some people inherently more likely to be criminals? Is there a “crime gene,” and if so, does this gene absolve some law breakers of responsibility? Are criminals called into existence, *interpellated*, as Louis Althusser suggests in his discussion of ideology? Some of these questions require us to consider whether or not we have free will.
- 4) How does the law operate? Is there, as Michel Foucault maintains, a difference between discipline and punishment? What should be the goal of the law? Is the aim of the law to rehabilitate criminals, to punish criminals as a deterrent to other would be criminals, to exact retribution on behalf of victims or something else?
- 5) How have the principles of crime detection and law enforcement changed? Where should the emphasis of law enforcement be – on prevention, on deterrence, or on punishment?
- 6) What are the responsibilities of judges and lawyers, and how have these professions evolved? Must a jury follow the law, or may a jury set aside the law for the sake of “justice”?

### **Recommended Texts:**

(Obviously, this is not a class in the traditional sense, so readers are encouraged to find whatever editions of the texts are most affordable. Also, it is likely that readings may get cut if the pacing of the class seems too hectic, so fear not.)

### **Textbook 1**

Author: Atwood, Margaret

Title: *Alias Grace*

ISBN-13: 978-0385490443

**Textbook 2**

Author: Braithwaite, Oyinkan  
 Title: *My Sister, The Serial Killer*  
 ISBN-13: 978-0525564201

**Textbook 3**

Author: Dostoevsky, Fyodor  
 Title: *Crime and Punishment*  
 ISBN-13: 978-0-141192802

**Textbook 4**

Author: Márquez, Gabriel García  
 Title: *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*  
 ISBN-13: 978-1400034710

**Textbook 5**

Author: Rubenhold, Hallie  
 Title: *The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper*  
 ISBN-13: 978-1328663818

An assortment of other texts will be provided as handouts or online.

**Course Requirements**

- ◆ Participation – everyone should come having done (some) of the readings, and be willing to talk about them.
- ◆ Keep a notebook – this won’t be collected (obviously), but I want to encourage everyone to keep a notebook about readings and class discussions.

**Grading:**

This is the best kind of class – a class for the love of learning – so there are no grades or credit to be earned. Just come and enjoy.

**Class Schedule (This is a flexible schedule, which means that, as necessary, discussions may continue on to subsequent weeks. The schedule may also change, but we will inform you of any major changes in advance)**

| <i>WEEK 1:</i> |  |
|----------------|--|
| January 16     | Class introduction<br>READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Robert Browning, “My Last Duchess”<br>Augusta Davies Webster, “A Castaway” |

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|-------------------------|---|
| <b>WEEK 2:</b>          |   |
| January 23              | READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Fyodor Dostoyevsky's <i>Crime and Punishment</i> , pp. 5-106.   |
| <b>WEEK 3:</b>          |   |
| January 30              | READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Fyodor Dostoyevsky's <i>Crime and Punishment</i> , pp. 107-232. |
| <b>WEEK 4:</b>          |   |
| February 6              | READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Fyodor Dostoyevsky's <i>Crime and Punishment</i> , pp. 233-334. |
| <b>WEEK 5:</b>          |   |
| February 13             | READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Fyodor Dostoyevsky's <i>Crime and Punishment</i> , pp. 335-430. |
| <b>WEEK 6:</b>          |   |
| February 20             | READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Fyodor Dostoyevsky's <i>Crime and Punishment</i> , pp. 431-524. |
| <b>WEEK 7:</b>          |   |
| February 27             | READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Fyodor Dostoyevsky's <i>Crime and Punishment</i> , pp. 525-658. |
| <b>WEEK 8:</b>          |   |
| March 5                 | READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Margaret Atwood's <i>Alias Grace</i> , pp. 1-111.               |
| <b>WEEK 9: NO CLASS</b> |   |
| March 12                | READ:<br>Margaret Atwood's <i>Alias Grace</i> , pp. 112-223                           |
| <b>WEEK 10:</b>         |   |
| March 19                | READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Margaret Atwood's <i>Alias Grace</i> , pp. 224-342              |
| <b>WEEK 11:</b>         |   |
| March 26                | READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Margaret Atwood's <i>Alias Grace</i> , pp. 343-460              |
| <b>WEEK 12:</b>         |   |
| April 2                 | READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Hallie Rubehnhold's <i>The Five</i> , pp. 1-155                 |
| <b>WEEK 13:</b>         |   |
| April 9                 | READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Hallie Rubehnhold's <i>The Five</i> , pp. 156-299.              |
| <b>WEEK 14:</b>         |   |
| April 16                | READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Gabriel García Márquez's <i>Chronicle of a Death Foretold</i>   |

| <i>WEEK 15:</i> |  |
|-----------------|--|
| April 23        | READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Oyinkan Braithwaite's <i>My Sister, The Serial Killer</i> , pp.1-112.    |
| <i>WEEK 16:</i> |  |
| April 30        | READ BEFORE CLASS:<br>Oyinkan Braithwaite's <i>My Sister, The Serial Killer</i> , pp.113 -223. |