

ENGL 3404: Major Authors in American Literature
Studies of Popular Texts
Hardboiled!
Fall 2022

Course Description:

Through close consideration of five vital 20th-century American authors—Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler, Patricia Highsmith, and Chester Himes—and selected film adaptations of their work, we will examine the distinctly American genre of hardboiled crime fiction from its beginnings in the pulp magazines of the 1920s through the complex noir fiction of the 1950s and 1960s. The first objective of the course is to study the emergence and codification of genre: we will explore how a new type of literary work comes into existence by adapting older forms, how the implicit rules of this new genre become established, and how writers experiment with these new rules. The second objective of the course is to study this fiction as a response to and reflection of historical conditions: with particular attention to the ways in which these novels work through problems of race, gender, class, and sexuality, we will investigate how they reflect American culture in the middle decades of the twentieth century.