Most know that the figure of the private detective was invented by Edgar Allan Poe in 1837, when he created an infallible sleuth named Auguste Dupin. That creation fulfilled certain needs for Poe personal—but evidently others needed the character as well. From Poe’s time through the Gilded Age; through World War 1 and into the Noir World of post-atomic America, the character has not only survived, but has shown a remarkable ability to adapt with the times. Poe’s Dupin, after all, was a bringer of order—a kind of God figure in a chaotic world. Modern detective often find that very chaos overwhelming them: they are tarnished knights on the “mean streets” of one dark American city or another—and their reward is often isolation on life’s “frozen star,” as Raymond Chandler would have it.

It is my hope that this course will be interdisciplinary in all aspects; we want to locate these detective figures and their creators in their times and places, and that will involve bringing history, culture, geography, and anything else we deem important to our pursuit. This will be my first offering in my new teaching environment, and I will do all I can to make it information and memorable!

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PRIMARY TEXTS


F is for Fugitive, by Sue Grafton, St. Martin’s Paperbacks, 1989.


SECONDARY READINGS


SCHEDULE

SESSION ONE  Welcome and Introductions.
Where It All Started: The Edgar Allan Poe Story

SESSION TWO  Reading Assignment: The Maltese Falcon
The Pinkerton Agency and the Birth of the Hard-Boiled

SESSION THREE:  Reading Assignment: The Long Goodbye
Chandler’s Mean Streets: Los Angeles and the Private Eye
SESSION FOUR: READING ASSIGNMENT: Devil in a Blue Dress
  The Private Eye and the African-American Experience

SESSION FIVE: READING ASSIGNMENT: Eight Million Ways to Die
  The Mean Streets of New York and The Private Eye’s Alcohol Problem

SESSION SIX: READING ASSIGNMENT: F is the Fugitive
  The Female Investigator

SESSION SEVEN: READING ASSIGNMENT: Fallout
  The FEMINIST Investigator

SESSION EIGHT: READING ASSIGNMENT: Desperado—A Mile-High Noir
  The Mexican-American Investigator

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