Advanced English: Creative writing - Hard-boiled fiction in America, breaking the codes of the genteel tradition to declare an American literary independence

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This course is meant for students of the advanced C1 and C2 levels. Theme-based language classes aim at developing written and oral skills through the study of a specific topic.

Course Objectives

This is a 12 week-course exploring detective novels and films as a means of improving student understanding and use of English. This course has three main objectives:

- Introducing students to crime fiction both through its literary and filmic manifestations.
- Facilitating the development of linguistic and critical skills using different types of texts.
- Encouraging collaboration and creative thinking and production.

Course description

In the first weeks of the semester, we will analyze three novels by Agatha Christie, Queen of Crime: The Murder of Roger Ackroyd (1926), The Crime of the Orient Express (1934), and Death on the Nile (1937). Extracts from the following movie adaptation will also be studied: The Crime of the Orient Express directed by Sydney Lumet in 1974, Death on the Nile directed by John Guillerman in 1978. We will also work on Orson Welles’ radio adaptation of The Murder of Roger Ackroyd for the Campbell Playhouse in 1939.

We will then travel in time and in space to analyze how Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler have broken ties with the genteel tradition and its narrative codes. Works under study will include three novels, two screenplays and three movies:

- Novels: The Maltese Falcon (1930), The Thin Man (1934) by Dashiell Hammett and The Big Sleep (1939) by Raymond Chandler.
- Screenplays: Double Indemnity (1944) and The Blue Dahlia (1946).
- Essay: The Simple Art of Murder by Raymond Chandler.
- Movies: **Double Indemnity** directed by Billy Wilder in 1944, **The Big Sleep** directed by Michael Winner in 1978, **The Blue Dahlia** directed by George Marshall in 1946, and **The Maltese Falcon** directed by John Houston in 1941.

Finally, students will be invited to write a short detective novel collaboratively, using the codes of the British genteel tradition or the ones of American hard-boiled fiction. For students who have developed skills in video editing, they can collaborate on a script that will be used to create a crime movie.

**Organization**

Activities will cover the four language skills:
- Reading: assigned novels and movies.
- Speaking: in class discussions and presentations.
- Listening: film and radio extracts, interviews and presentations.
- Writing: both critical and creative.