



National Taiwan University of Science and Technology

2020 Winter Program

ENG 400 Pulp Fiction

Course Outline

Course Code: ENG 400

Instructors: Professor Robert Barsky; Home Institution: Vanderbilt University

and

Professor R. Benedito Ferrão; Home Institution: The College of William and Mary

Office Hours: Conducted by Professor Ferrão at designated times

Email: rbferrao@wm.edu

Credits: 4

Course Overview:

The term “pulp fiction” originally referred to cheap paperback books aimed at the mass market rather than the cultural elite. Some of the original “pulp” were reprinted literary classics, but the term “pulp fiction” became most familiarly associated with lurid, sensational stories. Today, pulp fiction is sometimes used as a general label for popular genres like mysteries, westerns, or romances, but the early connotations of cheap thrills and low quality lingers, and in some circles genre fiction gets as little critical respect as the “pulp” once did.

Course Description:

In this class, we will read a selection of novels and short stories from three genres associated with the “pulp” tradition—a Western, a mystery, and a romance—considering their historical contexts, their formal features, and the vexed question of their literary merit—all while enjoying their often spectacular story-telling and entertainment value.

Learning Outcomes:



By the completion of this course, students will have a strong understanding of the history, role and importance of Pulp Fiction. Students will also be given the opportunity to write their own pulp fiction.

Required Textbooks and Films:

- Textbook: [The New Mammoth Book Of Pulp Fiction](#) *Kindle Edition*, Sold by Hachette Book: **\$3.99**
- [How to Write Pulp Fiction](#) *Kindle Edition*: **\$3.99**

Students might wish to look at some pulp-fiction inspired films, including Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*, Bryan Singer's *The Usual Suspects*, Christopher Nolan's *Memento*, Steven Soderbergh's *Out of Sight*, and the John Cusack vehicle, *Grosse Pointe Blank*.

Grading & Evaluation:

I am open to an array of possible essay topics. For example, you are invited to write about the history of pulp fiction, the history and biography of a famous pulp fiction writer, or the relationship between pulp fiction and other genres. You can also write a pulp fiction story, imitating the style of a pulp fiction writer.

Participation 10%

Writing Assignment 1 (5-7 pages): 30%
Due on 28 December

Writing Assignment 2 (5-7 pages): 30%
Due on 7 January

Writing Assignment 3 (5-7 pages): Final 30%
Due on 13 January

Grading Scale

A	94-100	C	74-76
A-	90-93	C-	70-73
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	84-86	D	64-66
B-	80-83	D-	60-63
C+	77-79	F	0-59

Course Schedule:

Week 1:



- 1) What is the history of pulp fiction, and how does it develop, from early nineteenth-century dime novels right up to the proliferation of mass-produced paperbacks;
- 2) What are the links between “canonical” works and writers of pulp fiction? Here we will foray into Paris, where a number of famous writers got their start by writing notoriously bawdy fiction for the consumption of Parisian tourists.

Week 2:

- 3) How does pulp fiction relate to such terms as “national romance,” “the culture industry,” and “mass culture”?
- 4) What do we learn from pulp fiction about plot-driven narratives, the so-called cliff-hangers, and what this means about the genre?

Week 3:

- 5) What do “pulp” and “popular” have in common? This will lead us into discussions of populism, mass culture, subculture, the “people,” and the politics of style.
- 6) What do we learn about pulp fiction through our examinations of the detective novel, adventure story, science fiction, the romance, the spy thriller, and the western, among others;

Week 4:

- 7) The idea of pulp fiction finds its way into the commercial space, in particular in advertisements. This is unsurprising given the popularity of the genre, but it’s also linked to work from more historical genres, such as the Historical Avant-Garde, which we will discuss.
- 8) We will focus upon the question of how pulp fiction intersects with other popular media, such as radio, television, and music.