

ENGL 215: EARLY MODERN CRIME

Prof. Colby Gordon

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Office: English House 210

Office Hours: Tues. 9:00-12:00 in English House (and by appointment)

Fall 2026

Class Time: M/W 1:10-2:30

Room: EHouse Lecture Hall

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course taps into our continuing collective obsession with criminality, unpacking the complicated web of feelings attached to crime and punishment through early modern literary treatments of villains, scoundrels, predators, pimps, witches, king-killers, poisoners, mobs, and adulterers. By reading literary accounts of vice alongside contemporary and historical theories of criminal justice, we will track competing ideas about punishment and the criminal mind. This course pays particular attention the ways that people in this historical moment mapped criminality onto dynamics of gender, race, sexuality, disability, and religion according to cultural conventions very different from our own.

REQUIRED TEXTS (AVAILABLE AT BRYN MAWR BOOKSTORE)

- Thomas Dekker, *The Witch of Edmonton* (Arden, 2016)
- C. de Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun*, trans. Michele and Gabriel Stepto (Beacon Press, 1997)
- Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. David Scott Kastan and Matthew Hunter, 2nd. Edition (Norton 2023)
- Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, ed. Stephen Guy-Bray (New Mermaids, 2014)
- William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, ed. John Jowett (Oxford, 2000)
- William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Eugene Waith (Oxford, 2008)
- John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Michael Neill (Norton Critical Editions, 2015)

Additional readings, marked with an asterisk, are available on our course Moodle site.

CONTENT ADVISORY

Because of the nature of our class, our readings will engage with difficult material, including physical violence, sexual assault, racism, and colonialism. I will do my best to signal if sensitive matter is coming up in the readings or likely to be discussed in class, and you may want to consult summaries of the works we're reading as well. I want to encourage you to speak with me as soon as possible if you have particular concerns about encountering these topics.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Please consult the schedule of assigned readings posted on Moodle. Note that the schedule is subject to change.

EXAM DATES

Exam 1 (In-Class) Wed., Oct. 7
Exam 2 (In-Class) Wed., Nov. 18
Final Exam due by **noon** on **Friday, Dec. 18**

GRADING

Exams: 50 points possible for each; I will drop the lowest score
Stage and Record a Scene (this can be done in a group): 5 points (1x max)
Memorize and recite a passage from a play in class: 3 points (1x max)
Memorize and recite a passage from a play in office hours: 2 points (1x max)
Rest Activity: 1 point (2x max)

No assignment is required. You can earn points by completing assignments in whatever combination works best for you and your schedule.

Final grades will be determined by the total number of points you earn, according to this chart:

4.0: 95+ points
3.7: 90-94 points
3.3: 85-89 points
3.0: 80-84 points
2.7: 75-79 points
2.3: 70-74 points
2.0: 65-69 points

LATE WORK:

I will give you extensions for papers; you do not need to give me a reason or provide documentation. Please reach out to me **in advance** if you are able to, and we will talk together about making arrangements that work best for your situation. Remember: if you have completed *any* amount of writing, you can always submit it for a “revise and resubmit.” In order to give you as much flexibility as I can while not overwhelming my own capacity to grade, **weekly responses** cannot be submitted after the deadline has passed *unless* you have received a “revise and resubmit.”

AI POLICY:

The use of AI at any stage in the writing process is strictly prohibited.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Excessive absences (more than 6) is grounds for failure of the course.