

**Topics in Twentieth-Century Literature****Popular Reading: Low to Middling Genres, 1890–1945**

<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~ag978/437>

MTH 2 (Mondays and Thursdays, 9:50 a.m.–11:10 a.m.) in Scott 102

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Office: Murray 031; hours: Mondays 2:30–4:30 p.m. or by appointment

**Description**

This course explores a key period in the history of pleasure reading and genre writing in English: the first half of the twentieth century. By 1900, more books were being published and more people were reading for entertainment than ever before, on both sides of the Atlantic. What did people read? This seminar looks at the beginnings of genres that rose to popularity around 1900 and continue to flourish today, even if they aren't always classified as "literature": mystery, romance, thriller, science fiction. We will also read some examples of popular poetry and of a more respectable novelistic genre that was nonetheless too popular for the most advanced taste: the realist novel. We will pay special attention to gender among readers and writers; developments in publishing; sincerity and self-consciousness; sex and violence; the question of realism and the fantastic; the fictions of social class; the impact of war; and the varieties of prose style.

This reading-intensive seminar will culminate in a research paper requiring each student to choose and study a further example of one of the genres studied in the course. In order to build meaningfully to the paper, this course will require a series of exercises which are more like problem sets than self-sufficient essays. Over the course of the semester these exercises will afford practice in the skills of formal analysis of a single text, reflecting on texts within a genre, studying responses to a literary text, and identifying primary and secondary sources for research. A research presentation at the end of term, before the paper is due, will create an occasion to synthesize research results ahead of the formal paper—and give everyone a chance to share the fruits of their work in the course with one another.

**Learning goals**

1. Think and write critically about individual texts in terms of genre.
2. Write a researched literary-historical argument that requires independently finding primary and secondary sources.
3. Join the scholarly conversation about low and high culture, literary taste, literary value, and the uses of imaginative writing.
4. Acquire broad knowledge of popular literatures in English in the 1890–1945 period, including some familiarity with the history of publishing and readership.

**Requirements****10% Participation**

Attendance and active, thoughtful participation in discussion are required. The purpose of a seminar is for us to learn by addressing difficult questions together. This requires every student to take the intellectual risk of offering observations, ideas, and arguments in class in response to one another and to the professor. Lateness, lack of preparation, or disruptive behavior during seminar will affect the participation mark.

One absence is allowed without penalty. If you fall ill or miss class for a family emergency, please contact me as soon as possible; you can make up for an excused absence (by meeting with me or by writing a short response paper). Any unexcused absences after the first will significantly affect the participation mark. Missing more than four classes without excuse will normally result in a failing grade for the course. Students can do work to make up for unexcused absences only at my discretion.

### **20% Exercises**

Short written exercises will be assigned roughly every other week. They will have a status similar to problem sets in science and engineering classes: their aim is to develop skills of analysis for the research paper. They will be graded (generously).

### **20% Research presentation**

Over the course of the final class three sessions, each student will give a short talk (10 minutes) on their research for the final paper. The talk should focus on the additional reading the student has done for the paper, presenting and interpreting textual evidence within a coherent argumentative frame. The presentation need not be as formal or detailed as the final paper.

### **50% Final paper**

12–15 pages. Each student will select and read at least one substantial additional fictional text in one of the genres we have studied. On the basis of this reading, the paper will make an argument, using that text together with the assigned readings, about some aspect of a particular fictional genre in the first half of the twentieth century. The paper must also address several relevant secondary sources.

### **Grading standards**

N.B. You cannot pass the course unless you complete the presentation and the paper.

Grades will be given on the four-point scale as specified [in the Undergraduate Catalog](#). For the purpose of converting the final numerical mark to a letter, the equivalents specified in the Catalog will be considered to be the *maxima* of intervals open on the left and closed on the right. Thus A corresponds to scores strictly greater than 3.5 and less than or equal to 4.0, B+ to scores greater than 3.0 and less than or equal to 3.5, B to scores greater than 2.5 and less than or equal to 3.0, and so on. Final grades will not be normalized to fit any particular distribution or “curve.” The general standards for grades are as follows; numerical equivalents use the mathematical notation for an interval which does not include its lower end but does include its upper end:

A range (3.5, 4.0]: Outstanding. The student’s work demonstrates thorough mastery of course materials and skills.

B range (2.5, 3.5]: Good. The student’s work demonstrates serious engagement with all aspects of the course but incomplete mastery of course materials and skills.

C range (1.5, 2.5]: Satisfactory. The student’s work satisfies requirements but shows significant problems or major gaps in mastery of course material.

D (0.5, 1.5]: Poor or minimal pass. The student completes the basic course requirements, but the student’s work is frequently unsatisfactory in several major areas.

F [0, 0.5]: Failure. Student has not completed all course requirements or turns in consistently unsatisfactory work.

## Academic integrity

The students and the professor have a duty to each other and to our community to abide by norms of academic honesty and responsibility. To present something as your own original writing when it is not is plagiarism. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating are serious violations of trust. Academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will have severe consequences, in accordance with the University Policy on Academic Integrity and the Code of Student Conduct. For details about the University's academic integrity policies, please see [academicintegrity.rutgers.edu](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu).

## Students with disabilities

All reasonable accommodation will be given to students with disabilities. Students who may require accommodation should speak with the professor at the start of the semester. For more information, please consult the Office of Disability Services on the web at [disabilityservices.rutgers.edu](http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu) or by phone at 848-445-6800.

## Assigned Readings

Print readings are available at [Barnes & Noble](http://Barnes & Noble); you are free to acquire them elsewhere. I have given ISBN numbers of the editions I ordered so that you can search for the books on amazon or elsewhere. Other editions from reputable publishers are normally fine for study, but please e-mail me to make sure.

All books will also be available on reserve at Alexander Library.

Some reading selections will be available through the course Sakai site.

Many of our course texts can also be found in free online versions. In general the book versions are much preferable, but in some cases online texts can be acceptable (though usually worse for study). This matter will be discussed at the first class meeting; see also [the explanatory page about online texts on the course website](#).

**N.B. Clickable links to online texts are embedded in the PDF and website versions of this syllabus.**

*Amazing Stories*, nos. 1 and 2. Pulp Magazine Project scans: [no. 1](#), [no. 2](#).

Buchan, John. *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. Ed. Christopher Harvie. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN 9780199537877. Or [scan of 1915 Grosset & Dunlap ed. \(Internet Archive\)](#).

Cain, James M. *Double Indemnity*. New York: Vintage, 1989. ISBN 9780679723226.

Chandler, Raymond. *The Big Sleep*. New York: Vintage, 1988. ISBN 9780394758282.

Chandler, Raymond. "The Simple Art of Murder." [Text online](#).

Conan Doyle, Arthur. "A Scandal in Bohemia." Online in [Google scan of Strand, vol. 2 \(1891\)](#), 61–75.

Conan Doyle, Arthur. *The Sign of Four*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2001. ISBN 9780140439076. Or [scan of 1890 Spencer Blackett ed. \(Internet Archive\)](#).

Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca*. Avon, 1994. ISBN 9780380778553.

Eliot, Simon, and Jonathan Rose, eds. *A Companion to the History of the Book*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007. Excerpt.

Frow, John. *Genre*. London: Routledge, 2006. Excerpt online.

Gelder, Ken. *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field*. London: Routledge, 2004. Excerpt online.

Glyn, Elinor. *Three Weeks*. Read on library reserve or [in online scan of the 1909 Macaulay ed. \(Internet Archive\)](#).

Household, Geoffrey. *Rogue Male*. New York: New York Review Books Classics, 2007. ISBN 9781590172438.

Hull, E.M. *The Sheik*. Rpt. Philadelphia: Pine Street Books, 2001. ISBN 9780812217636. Or [Google Scan of 1921 Maynard, Small edition](#), electronic text on course website, or [plain text from Project Gutenberg](#).

Lewis, C. S. *Out of the Silent Planet*. New York: Scribner, 1938. ISBN 9780743234900.

Lovecraft, H.P. *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*. Ed. S.T. Joshi. New York: Penguin, 1999. ISBN 9780141182346. Other Lovecraft anthologies are acceptable (I particularly like the one from the Library of America.)

MacKay, Marina. *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Excerpt online.

Maugham, W. Somerset. *The Painted Veil*. New York: Vintage, 2004. ISBN 9780307277770.

Moretti, Franco. "The Slaughterhouse of Literature." *MLQ* 61, no. 1 (March 2000): 207–227. [Online via Rutgers Library](#).

Radway, Janice A. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984. Excerpt on course website.

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 1993. Excerpt on course website.

Sayers, Dorothy. *Whose Body?*. Rpt. New York: Dover, 2009. ISBN 9780486473628. There is also a Harper edition, ISBN 9780061043574.

Steinbeck, John. *In Dubious Battle*. Ed. Warren French. London: Penguin, 2006. ISBN 9780143039631. Other editions are fine.

Hossain, Rokeya Sakhawat. "Sultana's Dream." In *"Sultana's Dream: A Feminist Utopia" and Selections from "The Secluded Ones."* New York: Feminist Press, 1988. ISBN 9780935312836. [Or online text \(from UPenn Library\)](#).

Wells, H.G. *The Time Machine*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004. ISBN 9780743487733. Other editions are fine, [or online scan of 1895 Henry Holt ed. \(Internet Archive\)](#).

Wilson, Edmund. "Tales of the Marvellous and the Ridiculous." *New Yorker*. November 24, 1945. Course website.

## Schedule

### Genre and Popular Reading: A Framework

#### Week 1

Thursday, September 6. Introduction.

#### Week 2

Monday, September 10. Background on genre and popular reading.

Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose, eds., *A Companion to the History of the Book*, 291–93, 341–50, 368–73.

Ken Gelder, *Popular Fiction*, 11–13, 40–46, 55–60, 64–67.

John Frow, *Genre*, 6–17, 124–31.

Marina MacKay, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel*, 135–43.

Ungraded “fieldwork” exercise.

#### Mystery

Thursday, September 13. Conan Doyle, *The Sign of the Four* (1890).

Exercise: identify four signs of the novel’s genre and analyze their individual functions.

#### Week 3

Monday, September 17. Conan Doyle, “A Scandal in Bohemia” (1891).

Online in [Google scan of vol. 2 of \*The Strand\*](#), 61–75.

In class: What is a magazine? *The Strand* as a popular reading medium.

See also: [Google scan of \*Strand\*, vol. 1](#).

Thursday, September 20. Dorothy Sayers, *Whose Body?* (1923).

In class: is it literary?

#### Week 4

Monday, September 24. Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (1939).

In class: violence.

Thursday, September 27. Chandler, continued.

Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder.” [Text online](#).

Franco Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature,” *MLQ* 61, no. 1 (March 2000): 207–227. [Online via Rutgers Library](#).

Exercise due: Investigate a device in Doyle.

#### Love story / Romance

#### Week 5

Monday, October 1. Elinor Glyn, *Three Weeks* (1907).

Library reserve or [online scan of 1909 U.S. edition](#).

Focus on chaps. 1–13.

Romance, *roman*, novel: what is a “genre” love story?

**Thursday, October 4.** Glyn, continued.

Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance*, 19–21, 86–99, 209–13 (required); 25–33, 131–35, 213–22 (optional). Excerpts online on Sakai.

Begin reading E.M. Hull, *The Sheik* (1919). Pine Street reprint or [Google Scan of 1921 edition](#) or electronic text on Sakai.

### Week 6

**Monday, October 8.** Hull, *The Sheik*.

Focus on chaps. 1–6.

Orientalism from below?

**Thursday, October 11.** Hull, *The Sheik*, concluded.

Begin Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca*.

**Optional:** Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. Short excerpt on Sakai.

**Exercise due: romance reception research.**

### Week 7

**Monday, October 15.** *Rebecca*, continued.

### First Interlude: Poetry Genres and the Great War

(Week 7, continued)

**Thursday, October 18.** What can poetic genres tell us about fictional genres?

Poetry selections available on Sakai:

Charles T. Dazey, “At Carrizal” (1916).

Lurana Sheldon, “The Naturalized Alien” (1916).

Alan Seeger, “I have a rendezvous with Death” (1916).

John McRae, “In Flanders Fields” (1916).

Florence Guertin Tuttle, “If. A Mother to Her Daughter” (1917).

Sarah Norcliffe Cleghorn, “Peace Hath Her Belgiums” (1917).

Rupert Brooke, “The Soldier” (1915).

D.H. Lawrence, “Service of All the Dead” (1915).

Siegfried Sassoon, “‘They’” (1917).

Sassoon, “In the Pink” (1917).

Isaac Rosenberg, “‘Ah, Koelue...’” (1917).

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, “Rupert Brooke” (1917).

Walter de la Mare, “The Remonstrance” (1917).

Herbert Asquith, “The Volunteer” (1917).

Claude McKay, “If We Must Die” (1919).

### Week 8

**Monday, October 22. Class canceled.** Begin reading Wells and Hussain.

**Scientific Romance / Weird Fiction / SF**

**Thursday, October 25.** Poetry concluded; scientific utopia and dystopia.

H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895).

Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain, "Sultana's Dream" (1905).

**Bring to class:** poetry selections, Hussain.

**Week 9**

**Monday, October 29.** Class canceled by hurricane. **Exercise due:** generic comparison.

**Thursday, November 1.** Class cancelled by hurricane. Continue reading: Wells, *Amazing*, Lovecraft.

**Week 10**

**Monday, November 5.** Scientific romance to scientifiction.

Wells, *Time Machine*.

*Amazing no. 1:* All paratexts (ads, table of contents, etc.); Hugo Gernsback, "A New Kind of Magazine."

Introduced in class: H.P. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu."

Not discussed in class: G. Peyton Wertenbaker, "The Man from the Atom," 2 pts. (in *Amazing no. 1* and *Amazing no. 2*).

**Bring to class:** Wells, *Amazing* materials, Lovecraft.

(**Wednesday, November 7.**) **Exercise due: identify research topic.** Due on Sakai at noon.

See the explanation of the exercise in the [research paper assignment](#).

**Thursday, November 8.** **Meet in Alexander Library 413.**

Library session with Humanities Librarian Dr. Kevin Mulcahy.

Research workshop: finding secondary sources, then finding primary sources.

**Week 11**

**Monday, November 12.** Weird fiction. Whither science?

Lovecraft, continued.

Edmund Wilson, "Tales of the Marvellous and the Ridiculous." [Reading on Sakai](#).

**Optional:** C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*.

**Second Interlude: Realisms**

(**Week 11 continued**)

**Thursday, November 15.** W. Somerset Maugham, *The Painted Veil* (1925).

What are the generic protocols of Maugham's realism?

**Week 12**

**Monday, November 19.** Social problem fiction. Questions of documentation and commitment.

Maugham, *Painted Veil*, continued.

John Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle* (1936).

**Exercise due: annotated research paper bibliography.** See the explanation of the exercise in the [research paper assignment](#).

**Tuesday, November 20 (Thursday classes meet today).** Steinbeck, continued.  
Steinbeck's California journalism and this novel.

**From this point on, make time to complete your additional reading for the research presentation and paper.**

(Thursday, November 22. Thanksgiving recess.)

### **Thriller**

#### **Week 13**

**Monday, November 26.** Capability, confinement, nation.

Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915).

Geoffrey Household, *Rogue Male* (1939).

**Thursday, November 29.** Household, *Rogue Male*.

James Cain, *Double Indemnity* (1943).

Retrospective: genres in relation.

#### **Week 14**

**Monday, December 3.** Research presentations.

**Thursday, December 6.** Research presentations, continued.

#### **Week 15**

**Monday, December 10.** Research presentations, concluded.

**Thursday, December 13.** Reading day. No class.

**Tuesday, December 18, 3 p.m.** **Research papers due.** Turn in via Sakai Drop Box or drop off in person to my office, Murray 031.

### **Acknowledgments**

Thanks to Leif Sorensen, Lee Konstantinou, and Annette Keogh for suggestions.

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