

Research in Genre Fiction

Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:50–5:10 p.m., in HC-S210
Professor Andrew Goldstone (andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu)
Office hours: Mondays, 12:30–1:30, in MU 040A
<https://andrewgoldstone.com/rgf25>

Crime, fantasy, romance . . . science fiction, Western, horror: for the last hundred years, most of the fiction people have read in English has been what is now called “genre fiction.” And for most of the last hundred years, these categories of fiction have been largely ignored as features of literary history. Considered merely popular, juvenile, subliterate, genre fiction has only gradually become a subject of serious study in its own right. This course introduces students to the questions and challenges raised by the study of twentieth-century genre fiction: what is distinctive about the subliterate? Who reads and writes it? How has this changed? We will read and analyze exemplary genre fictions from multiple eras, including both early and recent texts in crime, science fiction, and romance. At the same time we will develop the skills necessary to research the literary history of these genres, focusing on both digitized materials and physical artifacts. The course culminates in a research paper focusing on a specific moment in the history of a genre. The major assignments of the course will build up to this research paper and offer multiple opportunities to present and workshop work in progress.

BOOKS TO BUY

Please buy the following books. For shopping online at bookshop.org, Amazon, or elsewhere, search using the ISBNs below.

Grafton, Sue. *A Is for Alibi*. New York: St. Martin's, 2005. ISBN: 9780312353810.

McQuiston, Casey. *One Last Stop*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2021. ISBN: 9781250244499.

VanderMeer, Jeff. *Annihilation*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014. ISBN: 9780374104092.

LEARNING GOALS

1. Analyze individual prose fiction texts from multiple subgenres in terms of their themes, formal characteristics, media, and social contexts.
2. Develop proficiency in finding and interpreting primary sources relevant to a research question in literature and culture.
3. Join the academic conversation about popular culture.
4. Write researched interpretive arguments about fictional texts informed by a sophisticated understanding of literary genre.

This course also satisfies the WCr Core Curriculum goal: Respond effectively to editorial feedback from peers, instructors, and/or supervisors through successive drafts and revision.

SCHEDULE

This schedule may change as the term goes on.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3.

Introduction.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8. CROSS SECTION: PULPS.

Print out and read these three magazine stories:

Christie, "The Tuesday Night Club." This story was first published in *The Royal Magazine* (December 1927) and *Detective Story Magazine*, June 2, 1928.

Stone, "The Conquest of Gola."

Schalk, "Love in a Penthouse."

Browse the scans of the magazines linked on Canvas. Skim rapidly from front to back, and find at least two interesting things. Consider: who is this for? How does it ask to be read? How can you tell?

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10. CORE SAMPLE: CRIME.

Doyle, "The Adventure of the Speckled Band." First published in *The Strand* (February 1892).

Chandler, "Smart-Aleck Kill." First published in *Black Mask* (July 1934).

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15. MORE SAMPLE: CRIME.

Grafton, *A Is for Alibi*, chaps. 1–2.

Swaminathan, "The Sixth Pandava."

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17. MODELS OF GENRE STUDY: CRIME.

Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, 1–10, 242–51, 262–65, 272–75.

Bordwell, *Perplexing Plots*, 8–13, 19–21, 194–97, 218–228.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22. ROMANCE: MEET CUTE.

Hull, *The Sheik*, chap. 1.

McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, 1–20.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24. THINKING ABOUT: ROMANCE.

Radway, *Reading the Romance*, 19–20, 25–29, 46–49, 86–118.
Hefner, *Black Pulp*, 51–69.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 29. SF: IT CHANGED.

Russ, “When It Changed.”
Butler, “Bloodchild.”

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 1. THINKING ABOUT: SF.

Rieder, *Science Fiction and the Mass Cultural Genre System*, 13–31, 41–53.
Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, 6–9, 180–83, 213–219.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 6. ONWARDS WITH THE STORY.

Grafton, *A Is for Alibi*, chaps. 1–10.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8.

Grafton, *A Is for Alibi*, chaps. 1–21.

(FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10.)

Short paper due.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 13.

Book Initiative visit (Javiera Barrientos and Mitchell Edwards).
Grafton, *A Is for Alibi*, complete.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 15. PROTO-ROMANCE.

Hull, *The Sheik*, chaps. 1–3.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 20.

Hull, *The Sheik*, complete.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22. CONTEMPORARY . . . OR IS IT?

McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, 1–40.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 27.

McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, 1–145.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29.

Wilkins, Driscoll, and Fletcher, *Genre Worlds*, chaps. 1 and 4.
McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, 1–193.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 3.

McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, 1–340.

(TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4.)

Project proposal due.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5.

McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, complete.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10. EVERYTHING IS WEIRD NOW.

VanderMeer, *Annihilation*, chap. 1.
Your own reading.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12.

VanderMeer, *Annihilation*, chaps. 1–2.
Your own reading.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17.

VanderMeer, *Annihilation*, chaps. 1–3.
Your own reading.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19.

VanderMeer, *Annihilation*, complete.
Your own reading.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24.

Peer workshop: research.

(WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 26. FRIDAY CLASSES MEET TODAY.)

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1.

Presentations.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3.

Presentations.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8. GENRE GOES DIGITAL.

McGurl, *Everything and Less*, chap. 3.

Thompson, *Book Wars*, chap. 1.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10. SHOW AND TELL AND DONE.

Exercise: find something interesting about genre now!

(WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17.)

Final paper due.

GRADING

The final grade will be calculated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{grade} = & 0.15(\text{participation}) + 0.05(\text{exercises}) + 0.20(\text{short paper}) \\ & + 0.1(\text{presentation}) + 0.50(\text{final paper}) \end{aligned}$$

Each grade is given on the four-point scale as specified in the Undergraduate Catalog. In converting the final numerical score to a letter, the equivalents in the Catalog are used as follows:

$3.5 < \text{grade} \leq 4.0$	A
$3.0 < \text{grade} \leq 3.5$	B+
$2.5 < \text{grade} \leq 3.0$	B
$2.0 < \text{grade} \leq 2.5$	C+
$1.0 < \text{grade} \leq 2.0$	C
$0.5 < \text{grade} \leq 1.0$	D
$\text{grade} \leq 0.5$	F

The final grade will be based on a numerical score but is subject to my discretion. Unsatisfactory work in all areas of the course will result in an F even if the numerical score corresponds to a passing grade.

PARTICIPATION

Attendance and active, thoughtful participation in discussion are required. Lateness, lack of preparation, and disruptive behavior affect the participation mark.

If you miss three or more classes without excuse, the *maximum* participation mark you can receive is 3.0 out of 4.0. Missing more than five meetings without an excuse will normally result in a failing grade for the course.

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.

EXERCISES

Occasional brief exercises will be assigned in class or as preparation for seminar meetings. These may include unannounced quizzes.

SHORT PAPER

A short paper on primary sources assigned in class in relation to the fiction genre chosen for the final paper will be due at midterm.

PRESENTATION AND FINAL PAPER

The main assignment is a paper on a moment in the history of romance, science-fiction, or crime fiction, including substantial discussion of primary sources beyond the syllabus, as well as consideration of primary and secondary sources from the syllabus. An in-class presentation on work in progress will be separately graded.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students and instructors 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. For the purposes of this course, I will also consider any use of so-called “AI” tools for generating text for assignments as a violation of academic integrity. 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.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

All reasonable accommodation will be given to students with disabilities. Students who may require accommodation should contact the Office of Disability Services (ods.rutgers.edu; 848-445-6800) and speak with me at the start of the semester.

OTHER READINGS AVAILABLE VIA CANVAS

- Bordwell, David. *Perplexing Plots: Popular Storytelling and the Poetics of Murder*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2023. <https://doi-org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/10.7312/bord20658>.
- Butler, Octavia E. "Bloodchild." *Asimov's Science Fiction*, June 1984, 34–54. https://archive.org/details/Asimovs_v08no6_1984-06.
- Chandler, Raymond. "Smart-Aleck Kill." In *Stories & Early Novels*, 52–93. New York: Library of America, 1995.
- Christie, Agatha. "The Tuesday Night Club." In *Miss Marple: The Complete Short Stories*, 1–15. New York: William Morrow, 1985.
- Doyle, Arthur Conan. "The Adventure of the Speckled Band." Chap. 8 in *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. New York: Harper, 1892. HathiTrust, 2024. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044074319898>.
- Hefner, Brooks E. *Black Pulp: Genre Fiction in the Shadow of Jim Crow*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021. <https://www.jstor-org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/stable/10.5749/j.ctv249sgjh>.
- Horsley, Lee. *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. <https://research-ebsco-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/plink/e5a60b76-e6ac-3b69-b7cf-dao87290180e>.
- Hull, E. M. *The Sheik*. Boston: Small, Maynard, 1921. HathiTrust, 2018. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/t02z3np01>.
- Luckhurst, Roger. *Science Fiction*. Cambridge: Polity, 2005.
- McGurl, Mark. *Everything and Less: The Novel in the Age of Amazon*. London: Verso, 2021. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rutgers-ebooks/reader.action?docID=6735676>.
- Radway, Janice A. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. New ed. 1984. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991. <https://muse-jhu-edu.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/book/44052>.
- Rieder, John. *Science Fiction and the Mass Cultural Genre System*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2017. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=d91beb6b-706f-3fad-8279-072f9079ed34>.
- Russ, Joanna. "When It Changed." In *Again, Dangerous Visions*, edited by Harlan Ellison, 253–60. New York: Doubleday, 1972.
- Schalk, Gertrude. "Love in a Penthouse." *Love Story Magazine*, April 11, 1931, 24–35. <https://archive.org/details/love-story-magazine-v-080-n-03-1931-04-11/page/24/mode/2up>.
- Stone, Leslie F. "The Conquest of Gola." *Wonder Stories* 2, no. 11 (April 1931): 1278–87. https://archive.org/details/Wonder_Stories_v02n11_1931-04/.
- Swaminathan, Kalpana. "The Sixth Pandava." In *Murder in Seven Acts: Lalli Mysteries*, 69–92. New Delhi: Speaker Tiger, 2018.
- Thompson, John B. *Book Wars: The Digital Revolution in Publishing*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021.
- Wilkins, Kim, Beth Driscoll, and Lisa Fletcher. *Genre Worlds: Popular Fiction and Twenty-First-Century Book Culture*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2n4w5hm>.