

**Everything But Modernism: Low to Middling Genres**  
**Preliminary Syllabus**

Andrew Goldstone

Mondays and Wednesdays at 3:15–5:05 p.m. in room 160-317

<http://www.stanford.edu/people/goldstone/genres>

## Description

The typical class on early-twentieth-century literature focuses on the serious, experimental, high-cultural literature that has come to be known as “modernism”: Joyce and Woolf and Faulkner, Eliot and Pound and Yeats. This isn’t that class. Instead, this seminar explores some of the many genres that got their start in Britain and the United States around 1900 and continue to flourish today, even if they aren’t always classified as “literature”: mystery, romance, thriller, science fiction. The course studies these genres as they were practiced between 1900 and 1940; it will also examine a more respectable form from the same period that was nonetheless too popular for the most advanced taste: the realist novel. And we will spend a week reflecting on genre in poetry as well.

Then as now, genres like mystery and romance were the most widely-read kinds of fiction, but they were, and are, considered less prestigious, less significant, and more ephemeral than the sort of literature esteemed by educated people, studied in college courses, and examined in scholarly books. Rejecting this narrow view that nothing but the advanced high culture of modernism matters to literary-historical study, this course takes all these low to middling genres seriously, surveying key examples from both sides of the Atlantic. Of course, taking these genres seriously doesn’t mean we needn’t have fun reading them. One major aim of the course is to recover part of the history of reading *for pleasure*—and to see where, and why, we do or do not enjoy another era’s reading pleasures ourselves. Other themes of the course include: gender and genre among readers and writers; developments in publishing; sincerity and self-consciousness; the U.S. vs. the U.K.; sex and violence; realism or verisimilitude; the fantastic; the fictions and facts of social class; the impact of war; the varieties of prose style.

Class meetings will largely concentrate on seminar discussion of the assigned readings, as we work together to understand the genres and what they tell us about literature and culture in the US and Britain before World War II. Students will be especially encouraged to reflect on continuities and changes from the decades after 1900 to the present day. Occasional mini-lectures will add historical and literary-theoretical background.

The other major enterprise of the class will be a research paper; starting from one or more of the texts introduced in class, students will carry out their own research into one of the authors or literary genres we read together. Class library visits and research workshops will provide guidance and feedback for this project throughout the quarter.

Knowledge of modernism is not required for this course. Students with no previous coursework in literature must ask the instructor’s permission to enroll.

## Readings

Primary texts will be available at the Bookstore. For those acquiring textbooks elsewhere, I have noted the ISBN’s of preferred editions here, but other editions are fine, and second-hand copies, if you can find

them, may be much less expensive. Since many of the books are out of copyright, it will also be possible to find them in free or inexpensive electronic forms. Students wishing to make use of electronic texts must consult with me first.

Selected short secondary readings (to be announced) will be made available on CourseWork.

In addition to the primary texts, which we will read carefully, we will also have supplementary texts with which to practice the essential scholarly (and life) skill of *not reading*. These “skimings” will consist of extra readings, freely available on Google Books, which students are to spend **no more than thirty minutes** examining. Students will then be asked to talk briefly about the material they skimmed in class.

Anand, Mulk Raj. *Untouchable*. Penguin. 0140183957.

Bennett, Arnold. *The Old Wives' Tale*. Penguin. 9780141442112.

Buchan, John. *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. Oxford. 0199537879.

Buchan, John. *Greenmantle*. Oxford. 0199537852.

[Both Buchan novels are also available in a less attractive omnibus: *The Four Adventures of Richard Hannay*, Godine, 0879238712.]

Chandler, Raymond. *Stories and Early Novels*. Library of America. 1883011078.

Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Penguin. 014043786X.

Gibbons, Stella. *Cold Comfort Farm*. Penguin. 0143039598.

Hossain, Rokeya Sakhawat. “Sultana’s Dream.” ([link](#))

Household, Geoffrey. *Rogue Male*. New York Review Books. 9781590172438.

Hull, Edith M. *The Sheik*. To be made available as a reader from the Stanford Bookstore. Also available as a free e-text from Project Gutenberg. ([link](#))

Lewis, C.S. *Out of the Silent Planet*. Scribner. 0743234901.

[Loos, Anita. “*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*” and “*But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes*.” Penguin. 0141180692. Though you will find this book in the Bookstore, it is **not required** for the course.]

Marsh, Edward, ed. *Georgian Poetry*, vols. 1–2. Excerpts to be made available.

du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca*. Avon. 0380778556.

[Students are encouraged to acquire this mass-market paperback reprint, but there is also a nicer edition: HarperCollins, 0380730405.]

Sayers, Dorothy. *Whose Body?* Harper. 9780061043574.

[There is also a cheaper edition: Dover, 9780486473628.]

Steinbeck, John. *In Dubious Battle*. Penguin. 9780143039631.

[Steinbeck aficionados may prefer to own the collection *Novels and Stories, 1932–1937*, Library of America, 9781883011017.]

Van Wienen, Mark, ed. *Rendezvous with Death: American Poems of the Great War*. University of Illinois. 0252070593.

Webb, Mary. *Precious Bane*. Virago. 0860680630.

Wells, H.G. *The War in the Air*. Penguin. 0141441305.

## Assignments and Grading

### Seminar participation: 20%

Students are expected to come to class prepared and ready to engage in discussion. The purpose of the seminar format is to allow you to take intellectual risks, trying new ideas, ways of expressing yourself, styles of argumentation, and modes of collaborating with others; to encourage you to take these risks, participation is a major component of your grade. You are, of course, expected to attend every class. If you have a serious reason why you must miss class, please contact me ahead of time. More than two unexcused absences will place you in danger of failing. If however you become seriously ill, *please stay home*, and get in touch with me as soon as you are well enough to do so.

### Presentation and first paper: 30%

In the fifth week students will each give a ten-minute presentation on some of the material covered thus far. This presentation must discuss two texts in relation to a single genre. It may also engage with secondary sources (scholarly, journalistic, biographical, historical). This presentation should then be written up as a 4–5 pp. paper.

### Research paper: 50%

In keeping with the course's emphasis on understanding literary history through broad reading, the quarter culminates in a research paper. The research paper will require you to study at least one primary text not on the syllabus. By the sixth week of the course you will select a genre to research from among those on the syllabus, including those studied later in the quarter. I will meet with each student in the course of this initial work. Making use of your skimming skills, you will prepare a prospectus for your research, including both new primary sources and secondary sources. You will then research and write a paper of moderate length, 10–14 pp., that displays careful reflection about the chosen genre and its place in twentieth-century literary and cultural history. These reflections must take the form of focused argument supported by textual evidence. One seminar will be at least partly devoted to a workshop on these papers.

## Office Hours and How to Reach Me

My office is 460–315. I will announce my standing office hours at the first class. I will also usually be available by appointment. I respond quickly to e-mails at [andrew.goldstone@stanford.edu](mailto:andrew.goldstone@stanford.edu). For urgent questions, feel free to call my cell phone between 9 a.m. and 10 p.m.; I'll give out my number on the first day of class.

## Honor Code

All students are to observe the Honor Code:

<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/vpsa/judicialaffairs/guiding/honorcode.htm>.

## Students with Disabilities

Students who have a disability that may require an academic accommodation or the use of auxiliary aids and services should contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) as soon as possible so that accommodations can be arranged.

## Class Schedule

### I. Introduction

Monday, September 20. Introduction.

Examples of modernism; examples of “everything but.” The question of genre.

### II. Mystery: From Gentlemen to Hardboiled Detectives

Wednesday, September 22.

Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (England, 1902) ([link](#))

Explanation of how to not read in preparation for first skimming assignment

Monday, September 27.

Dorothy Sayers, *Whose Body?* (England, 1923)

**Skim:** Mary Roberts Rinehart, *The Man in Lower Ten* (US, 1909) ([link](#))

Wednesday, September 29.

Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (US, 1939)

Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder” ([link](#))

### III. Romance: Sincere and Satire

Monday, October 4. **Meet in Barchas Room, Green Library.**

Class with Annette Keogh, Curator for American and British Literature

Dime novels and pulps. Research methods

**Read, in preparation for discussion next class:** Mary Webb, *Precious Bane* (England, 1924)

Wednesday, October 6.

Webb, *Precious Bane*

**Skim:** Ethel Dell, *The Way of an Eagle* (England, 1912) ([link](#))

(Friday, October 8. Study List deadline.)

Monday, October 11.

Stella Gibbons, *Cold Comfort Farm* (England, 1932)

Wednesday, October 13.

E.M. Hull, *The Sheik* (England, 1919)

Monday, October 18.

Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca* (England, 1938)

Wednesday, October 20.

**Presentations (10 minutes each)**

(Monday, October 25.) **Presentation write-up, 4–5 pp., due at noon.**

#### IV. Genres of Poetry: A Case Study in War Poetry

Monday, October 25. American war poems.

Mark van Wienen, ed., *Rendezvous with Death: American Poems of the Great War* (excerpts)

**Note:** Please also begin reading Bennett's long novel *The Old Wives' Tale* so that you will be ready to discuss it next week.

Wednesday, October 27. British poems of the 1910s.

Marsh, Edward, ed. *Georgian Poetry* (England, 1911–1915) (excerpts)

#### V. Realisms

Monday, November 1.

Arnold Bennett, *The Old Wives' Tale* (England, 1908)

(Tuesday, November 2.) **Research prospectus due**

Wednesday, November 3.

Bennett, *The Old Wives' Tale*

Research discussion.

Monday, November 8.

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

Wednesday, November 10.

Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (India, 1935)

(Friday, November 12. Course withdrawal deadline.)

#### VI. Thrillers: Spies in Two Wars

Monday, November 15.

John Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (England, 1915)

Buchan, *Greenmantle* (England, 1916)

Wednesday, November 17.

Geoffrey Household, *Rogue Male* (England/US, 1939)

(November 22–26. Thanksgiving recess; no class.)

#### VII. Science Fiction Before the “Golden Age”

Monday, November 29. Dead Week begins.

H.G. Wells, *The War in the Air* (England, 1908) ([link](#))

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, “Sultana’s Dream” (India, 1905) ([link](#))

Wednesday, December 1. Wrap-up.

C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (England, 1939)

(Wednesday, December 8.) **Research paper due, 10–14 pp.**

(Tuesday, December 14. Grades due.)