

## Twentieth-Century Genre The Case of the Detective

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<http://genre17.blogs.rutgers.edu>

Mondays, 9:50 a.m.

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Office hours: Mondays, 1 p.m.–2:50 p.m. in Murray 019 or by appointment

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Detective fiction, probably the single most-read and best-selling category of fiction across the whole of the last century, nonetheless occupies a marginal place in standard literary-historical accounts. The literary history of the twentieth century has instead usually been told as the story of modernism and its aftermath: this story, focusing on exceptional innovations, the dilemmas of literary art, and responses to “modernity,” has little to say about developments in commercial genres. But as the modernist framework has come to seem increasingly limited as a way to grasp the changing literary field as a whole, the significance of popular literature emerges as one of the major open problems of literary scholarship.

The aim of this course is to see what twentieth-century literature looks like—and how we are to study it—if we take the proliferating formulas of detective fiction, rather than the singular modernist work, as the paradigm. We consider the difference it makes to address some major literary-historical questions—the high-low divide, the process of formal change, the shifting media ecology, the representation of identity, the possibilities of literary politics, the scope of “world literature,” and, yes, the effects of modernity—through this commercial yet intellectualized genre. And, finally, we ask what methods are most adequate to this phenomenon, seeking to complement literary interpretation with other possibilities from book history and the sociology of culture.

This course does not intend to produce graduate-level Baker Street Irregulars but to raise significant twentieth-centuryist questions that can be brought to bear on many writers and many genres. I lay special emphasis on the fact that I can never figure out the culprit in advance and don’t really want to anyway.

### LEARNING GOALS

Students in this course will:

1. gain a broad understanding of the history of detective fiction, including developments in theme, form, and modes of publication;

2. analyze detective fiction in relation to large-scale structural transformations in twentieth-century literature, particularly in relation to modernism and its aftermath;
3. engage critically with multiple theoretical approaches to literary genre, using detective fiction as a case study;
4. reflect systematically on the methodologies needed to study popular and “high” literary texts together; and
5. carry out substantial independent research on detective fiction in primary and secondary sources and prepare an article-length argumentative essay on the subject.

## REQUIREMENTS

### 10% PARTICIPATION

There are many ways to participate actively and effectively in a seminar discussion. It is important for everyone (including the instructor) to reflect on what they are doing as a discussion participant and how they can best contribute to the development of the collective inquiry. I am always happy to meet one-on-one to talk over ideas or concerns about the seminar.

### 10% INFORMAL WRITING

Students are required to contribute to a course blog on a rotating basis; these contributions are graded credit / no credit.

### 80% LONG PAPER

The major assignment is a research paper of 20–25 pp. (8000–12000 words) making an argument building on the themes and materials of the course. In addition to engaging with the scholarly literature, students are expected to discuss at least one additional *primary* source. In the final class session each student will give a brief informal presentation of research in progress (not separately graded).

## STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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

## SCHEDULE

In the PDF version of this syllabus, clicking on a title takes you to the bibliography entry. On some days there is too much reading; we will deal with this, the fundamental condition of research, in various ways over the course of the term.

## MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 11. PRELUDE: MODERNISM MADE SIMPLE.

Please read in advance: Joyce, "The Dead."

## MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 18. PRECURSOR.

Selections from Poe, *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*:

"Murders in the Rue Morgue," [www.eapoe.org/works/mabbott/tom2to43.htm](http://www.eapoe.org/works/mabbott/tom2to43.htm).

Consider the earliest periodical context in *Graham's* (April 1841):

[search.proquest.com/americanperiodicals/docview/135598147](http://search.proquest.com/americanperiodicals/docview/135598147).

"The Purloined Letter," [www.eapoe.org/works/mabbott/tom3to11.htm](http://www.eapoe.org/works/mabbott/tom3to11.htm).

Frow, *Genre*, chaps. 1, 4.

## MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25. FOUNDING.

*The Sign of the Four*, in Conan Doyle, *Sherlock Holmes*.

Ginzburg, "Clues."

Boltanski, *Mysteries and Conspiracies*, chap. 2.

## MONDAY, OCTOBER 2. SYSTEMS.

Selections from Conan Doyle, *Sherlock Holmes*:

"A Scandal in Bohemia."

"The Speckled Band."

"His Last Bow."

Pirkis, "The Redhill Sisterhood."

Todorov, "The Typology of Detective Fiction."

Moretti, "The Slaughterhouse of Literature."

Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, 16–25.

## MONDAY, OCTOBER 9. MODERNISM'S OTHER.

Sayers, *Whose Body?*

Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, introduction and pt. 1, chaps. 1, 3.

Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." The original *Partisan Review* publication (vol. 6, no. 5 [Fall 1939]: 34–49) can be viewed in an excruciating Flash-based digitization at [hgar-srv3.bu.edu/collections/partisan-review/search/detail?id=283920](http://hgar-srv3.bu.edu/collections/partisan-review/search/detail?id=283920).

Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, introduction and chap. 3.

## MONDAY, OCTOBER 16. SERIES.

Sayers, *Strong Poison*.

Altman, *Film/Genre*, chap. 7.

Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed."

## MONDAY, OCTOBER 23. AMERICANS TWO WAYS.

Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*.

Collinson, "Arson Plus."

Daly, "Knights of the Open Palm."

McCann, *Gumshoe America*, chap. 1.

Recommended: spend a little time with the *Detective Story* materials on the Pulp Magazines Project.

## MONDAY, OCTOBER 30. GENERATIONAL SUCCESSION.

Selections from Chandler, *Stories and Early Novels*:

"Blackmailers Don't Shoot."

*The Big Sleep*.

Norman, "The Big Empty."

Smith, "The Hard-Boiled Writer and the Literary Marketplace."

Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder."

## MONDAY, NOVEMBER 6. HIGH-BROW.

Selections from Borges, *Labyrinths* and Borges, *Ficciones*; students with Spanish are very welcome to read in the original (the links are to magazine versions):

"An Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain."

(*Sur* 10, no. 79, [trapalanda.bn.gov.ar/jspui/handle/123456789/11499](http://trapalanda.bn.gov.ar/jspui/handle/123456789/11499).)

"Death and the Compass."

(*Sur* 12, no. 92, [trapalanda.bn.gov.ar/jspui/handle/123456789/11559](http://trapalanda.bn.gov.ar/jspui/handle/123456789/11559).)

"The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim."

"The Garden of Forking Paths."

Auden, "The Guilty Vicarage."

Holquist, "Whodunit and Other Questions."

Underwood, "The Life Cycles of Genres."

## MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13. PLURALIZATION (1).

Himes, *Cotton Comes to Harlem*.

Eburne, "The Transatlantic Mysteries of Paris."

McGurl, *The Program Era*, 56–63, 216–220.

## MONDAY, NOVEMBER 20. HIGH-LOW BOUNDARIES DISSOLVED?

Everett, *Assumption*. Don't stop short of the spectacular ending.  
Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, excerpt.

## MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27. PLURALIZATION (2).

Paretsky, *Indemnity Only*.  
Griswold, McDonnell, and Wright, "Reading and the Reading Class in the Twenty-First Century."

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 4. GLOBALIZATION, MASS-CULTURE STYLE.

Mankell, *Faceless Killers*. Students with Swedish are very welcome to read in the original (interlibrary loan is your best bet, probably).  
Berglund, "With a Global Market in Mind."  
Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature*, excerpt.

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 11. TASTING MENU.

Preliminary reading reports.

## MONDAY, JANUARY 8.

Final papers due. Submit on Sakai, then bring a paper copy to the graduate office by the end of the week.

## READINGS

The required books are available at Barnes & Noble, with further readings made available on Sakai. I have put these and supplementary references on reserve at Alexander. You are very welcome to obtain the required texts elsewhere, and other editions are fine provided you have all the assigned texts. Omnibuses, box sets, and anthologies are research opportunities.

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| <p>Altman, Rick. <i>Film/Genre</i>. London: British Film Institute, 1999. Excerpt available on Sakai.</p> <p>Auden, W.H. "The Guilty Vicarage: Notes on the Detective Story, by an Addict." <i>Harper's</i> 196, no. 1176, 406-12. <a href="https://search-proquest-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/docview/1301536154?accountid=13626">https://search-proquest-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/docview/1301536154?accountid=13626</a>. Also reprinted in <i>The Dyer's Hand</i> and the 1939-1948 volume of the complete prose.</p> <p>Beecroft, Alexander. <i>An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day</i>. London: Verso, 2015. Excerpt available on Sakai.</p> | <p>Berglund, Karl. "With a Global Market in Mind: Agents, Authors, and the Dissemination of Contemporary Swedish Crime Fiction." In <i>Crime Fiction as World Literature</i>, edited by Louise Nilsson, David Damrosch, and Theo D'haen. New York: Bloomsbury, 2017.</p> <p>Boltanski, Luc. <i>Mysteries and Conspiracies: Detective Stories, Spy Novels and the Making of Modern Societies</i>. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Polity, 2014. Excerpt available on Sakai.</p> |
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- . *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*. Edited by Donald A. Yates and James East Irby. New York: New Directions, 2007. ISBN: 9780811216999.
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- Chandler, Raymond. *Stories and Early Novels*. Edited by Frank MacShane. New York: Library of America, 1995. ISBN: 9781883011079.
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- Eburne, Jonathan P. "The Transatlantic Mysteries of Paris: Chester Himes, Surrealism, and the Série Noire." *PMLA* 120, no. 3 (May 2005): 806–21. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/stable/25486215>.
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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