

Sophister Option Description 2026-27

Option Name: NINETEENTH-CENTURY DETECTIVE FICTION: THE RIVALS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Option Short Title: RIVALS OF SHERLOCK

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Clare Clarke <clare.clarke@tcd.ie>

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester/Term Taught: HT

Year JS/SS: JS

Module Description and Learning Aims:

This module introduces students to the development of crime and detective fiction in this fascinating and formative period in the history of the genre. The module studies the most popular and prominent 19th century precursors and rivals of Sherlock Holmes, looking in depth at the key themes and concerns of the genre as it grew and developed. Combining close reading of nineteenth century detective novels, short stories, and non-fiction articles with a range of contextual and theoretical materials, students will study the social and historical contexts and consequences of issues such as class and urban space, gender, race, and empire upon literary representations of crime and detection over the course of the 19th century. We will interrogate the development of the detective figure, the political and ideological effects of reading detective fiction, and examine the popularity of the genre, questioning how and why certain texts endure and others disappear.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this module students will be able to:

- Trace the emergence and development of the detective genre through the 19th century in Britain and the USA
- Identify and examine key themes in 19th century detective fiction
- Discuss the themes and concerns of the set texts in relation to their social, historical, and political contexts
- Close read the primary texts paying attention to form, structure, language
- think critically about the ways in which the detective genre depicts criminality and heroism in terms of class, gender and race
- trace and interrogate developments in the history of crime fiction criticism, examining in detail a number of key approaches– Formalist, Marxist, Foucauldian, Historicist
- Demonstrate skills in archival research, oral and written communication, and teamwork
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Content:**Course Schedule:****Week 1: Texts, Contexts, Theories**

- Compulsory reading before class:
- Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891)
- Anne Humphreys, "British Detective Fiction in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries"
Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Literature
<http://literature.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-240> [On blackboard]
- Other secondary material: tbd

Detective Beginnings:**Week 2: The First Detective in Fiction:**

- Essential Reading:
- Edgar Allan Poe, The C. Auguste Dupin Stories (1841-5) – "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Purloined Letter" (1844),

Week 3: The Penny Blood:

- Essential reading:
- James Malcolm Rymer, *The String of Pearls* (1846/7)

Week 4: Mothers of the Mystery Genre:

- Essential reading:
- Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862)

Week 5: Female investigators:

- Essential reading:
- Wilkie Collins, "The Diary of Anne Rodway" (1856)

Week 6: Assessed presentations**WEEK 7: READING WEEK****Week 8: Victorian true crime, Jack the Ripper:**

- Essential reading
- Hallie Rubenhold, *The Five* (2019) [selected chapters]
- Excerpts from Victorian newspapers [provided on Blackboard]

Week 9: Sherlock's rivals:

- Essential reading:
- Fergus Hume, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1887)

Week 10: Sherlock

- Essential reading:
- Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1891-92) [selected stories]

Week 11: Sisters of Sherlock

- Essential reading:
- Catherine Louisa Pirkis, *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective* (1893) [selected stories]

Week 12:

- **Revision class and essay planning/tips**

Assessment Details (Including component percentage(s):

- 20% five-minute in class presentation (in pairs)
- 80% essay (4000 words)