

Professor Kelly Stage
Ripon College, English Department
ACM: London Module

Literary London: Texts and Performances of Real and Imagined London

Course Description:

This course focuses on London as a center of literary and dramatic production. By the end of the module, we will have explored the changing spaces and places of London over the course of its development from small city to global capital as they play out in literature and drama across several centuries. We will examine the way literary and historical texts, as well as urban spaces and contemporary performances, portray the dynamics of urbanism and the creation of a London identity. Our texts and the performances we attend will expose a number of urban developments and crises, including plague, disaster, economic shifts, the criminal underworld, class division, ecological awareness, and the development of trendy metropolitan social cliques. Recent historical, literary, and cultural criticism will frame our readings of primary materials, which will include diverse materials such as poetry, drama, prose, maps, diary entries, essays, and newspapers. We will contemplate the way literature, drama, and non-fiction accounts imagine London and we will use the city and its institutions (including the theater) as a text as well. How, we will ask, do London and Londoners define and redefine their identities across periods and today? How do the problems and opportunities of dynamic shifts, such as changing economic activity, national political centralization, and imperialism and its aftermath, become legible in the texts, performances, and fabric of the city?

Course Materials

Representative texts from c.1600-Present will form the basis of the class.

Performance texts

Theatrical performances and their texts will be a significant component of the course, dependent on the particulars of the given season. This is not yet a part of the course that can be specified in detail. Theater and its history in London will be an important part of the course, and readings will be adjusted to accommodate performances and the syllabus will eventually be shaped around selected plays and their texts.

Literary or Autobiographical texts may include, but are not limited to:

Thomas Dekker, *The Gull's Hornbook* and *The Wonderful Year* (excerpts)
Samuel Pepys, excerpts from Pepys' *Diary*, especially on the Great Fire of 1666
Jonathan Swift, "A City Shower"
Daniel Defoe, *Journal of a Plague Year* (excerpts)
Romantic poetry, less romantic urbanism: Blake and Wordsworth's London
Charles Dickens, "Sketches by Boz," selections
Robert Louis Stevenson, "Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"
Virginia Woolf, "Kew Gardens"
Elizabeth Bowen, "The Mysterious Kor"
Hanif Kureishi, "My Son the Fanatic"

Historical and Theoretical Texts:

London by Peter Ackroyd, excerpts

The Practice of Everyday Life Michel de Certeau, excerpt

Assessment and Expectations (note: these are guidelines, expectations may change before spring 2011):

Participation and class activities: students are expected to attend all scheduled classes and performances. Missing a class or performance session in such an abbreviated schedule will result losing points. Credit is awarded for active participation and class work; that is to say, answering and asking questions, doing group work and in-class writing, etc. Assessment in this category also includes in-class quizzes.

Short responses: Students will write four short (2 pp.) papers during the course, which will be split between discussing texts and performances. Short papers will be graded on the basis of their effectiveness in textual analysis and on their presentation; sloppy papers, even if with good ideas, will not garner high marks. One short response will be a report on a specific place in London; the assignment requires the student to visit their chosen location, offer a short history, and relate the place back to a specific text.

Long paper: One longer paper (5-6 pp.) will be expected around week 6. A choice of topics will be offered.

Final Exam: An essay-based exam will conclude the course and will especially focus on materials in the second half of the course (and thus not appropriate for the longer paper).