

LTEN 144 The British Novel: 1890 to Present

Literary London

Instructor: Ameeth Vijay

The city of London has captivated the literary imagination for centuries. This course will explore that literature, considering how the city has served as a setting for a diverse array of stories. We will consider how London's rapid urbanization in the nineteenth century was both a source of exhilaration over technological and cultural developments and anxiety about class conflicts and destruction of the countryside. London has also served as the center for Britain's vast empire and, more recently, as a place defined by postcolonial migration and by ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. In addition, this course finds that the metropole itself contains and creates centers and peripheries; thus several of the texts disarticulate the space of the city to reveal its complexity and unevenness. How has literature of the city responded to these tremendous changes? How has the city been formed not only through its physical changes and history but through its development in a literary and cultural imaginary? How does this history of representation affect the experience of the city in the present?

Fulfills B requirement for Literature majors

Texts

Edgar Allen Poe - "The Man of the Crowd" (pdf)
Mrs. Dalloway - *Mrs. Dalloway* (9780151009985)
Samuel Selvon – *The Lonely Londoners*
Zadie Smith - *N.W.*

Assignments

Attendance and Participation - 30%

- Attendance and discussion are key components of this class. While illness and emergencies are excused absences, students are otherwise required to come to class, be prepared, and offer their thoughts in a constructive and inclusive discussion space

Flâneur Journal - 20%

- For this assignment, students will record their own interactions with the city. This can include walks, observations of spaces, and attendance of events. I will offer weekly prompts to help guide student reflections

Final Essay - 50%

- The final essay will be a 8-10 page paper that compares at least two texts from the course. Successful papers will have a specific argument, closely analyze examples from the texts, situate each text in its historical and social context, and have a clear organization.

Schedule

Week 1: Walking in the World City

Edgar Allen Poe - "The Man of the Crowd" (pdf)

Mrs. Dalloway - *Mrs. Dalloway* pp. 1-86

Excursion: Literary walking tour of central London

This week's next not only feature the city of London, but feature characters who engage with the city at the street level. I will introduce the 19th century figure of the *flâneur* to the students, showing how urbanism changed in response to the explosive growth of cities and the advent of technological modernity. For this week's excursion, we will take a literary walking tour around central London, learning about the city's long history while also thinking about the subjectivity of the walker. Students will start to record their own observations of the city in their journal.

Week 2: Modernism and the City

Mrs. Dalloway - *Mrs. Dalloway* pp. 86-166

Excursion: Tate Modern museum

Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* is a seminal modernist novel, one that foregrounds themes of individual perspective and communal fragmentation in an experimental, "stream of consciousness" style. I often use visual art to teach students about modernist aesthetics. This excursion to the Tate modern museum will enable the class to learn about the development of modernism in the arts first hand. The Tate has one of the best permanent collections in modern art, a collection that is curated and presented in a pedagogically friendly manner.

Week 3: City of Immigrants

Samuel Selvon – *The Lonely Londoners* (all)

Excursion: British Museum

This week, we turn to the development of London as a multi-cultural and post-imperial space. We will consider how institutions of empire found their cultural expression in museums and exhibitions. A visit to the British Museum will not only allow students to explore its vast collection of historical artifacts, but to contemplate how those artifacts arrived in Britain, and how Britain's imperial history is still relevant to its contemporary existence.

Week 4: The Contemporary City

Zadie Smith - *N.W.* pp. 3-198

Excursion: Migration Museum

Week 5: The Contemporary City

Zadie Smith - *N.W.* pp. 198-401

Excursion: Walking tour of East London, Whitechapel Art Gallery

For the final two weeks of this course we will be reading the 21st century London novel, *NW*, a novel about the persistence of class conflict and the complexity of racial and gender identity. For this week, we will explore the rapidly changing neighborhoods of East London, considering their long working class history alongside their contemporary gentrification. A walking tour of East London, alongside a visit to the Whitechapel Art Gallery, will allow students to appreciate this history.