101 Years of London

Britain’s capital is ancient and modern, parochial and cosmopolitan, obdurate and metamorphic, grand and seedy, open and labyrinthine. A glistening river ebbs and flows through its center; its streets (like its inhabitants’ lives) are often dark and tangled. It is one of the most studied, and surveilled, cities in history, yet significant aspects of its past and present remain mysterious.

What, then, is London? And what is the art of London? To help us think about those questions, our class will focus on a set of novels set principally in London and written between 1907 and 2008. The timeframe is not determined simply by the vagaries of publication date: instead it is designed to position us in a chronological sweet-spot. The
shadow of the 19th century still hangs over the starting point for our course, the period we will examine includes the trauma of two world wars as well as the collapse of the British Empire, and the ending point gives us a window onto the new, post-9/11 realities of the 21st century. We’ll read books by, amongst others, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, Neil Gaiman, Monica Ali, Ian McEwen and Xiaolu Guo. In these novels, the city is not just a backdrop but something more like a character.

Our sessions will be centered on discussions of the books just mentioned, but each time we meet we will also look at materials in other genres and media (photographs, poems, maps, paintings, websites) that will help us expand our understanding and enjoyment of the city we’re exploring in fiction. No extensive knowledge of London, British culture, or novels is assumed. Just be ready to travel imaginatively off the beaten-track.

Learning Goals

The aims of this course are simple. By the end of the quarter you should feel that:

- you know about the basic history of London in the last century or so
- you can recognize and judge how novelists have drawn on and played with that history
- you can use your knowledge of how London has been represented fictionally to think about the issues of metropolitan experience generally and about novels set in other cities

Ways of Thinking/Ways of Doing

“101 Years of London” satisfies the breadth requirements for the Aesthetic and Interpretive Inquiry category.

Thus, after taking this class, you should be better able to:

- appreciate the nature of human responses to meaningful cultural objects, and distinguish among the different methods to interpret those responses;
- acquire and assess techniques of interpretation (including close reading techniques), criticism, and analysis of cultural texts, artifacts, and practices;
- demonstrate facility with the analysis of arguments for and against different theories and interpretations;
- understand diverse artistic, literary, and theoretical traditions, their characteristic forms of production, and/or their development across historical time;
- understand how expressive works articulate responses to fundamental human problems and convey important values.
Primary Texts


Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (1907)


Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956)

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925)

These books will be available at the Stanford Bookstore and, of course, are also widely available elsewhere.

Poems, images and other relevant texts will be available to class members on our Canvas course website during the quarter.

Course Requirements and Grading (percentages approximate)

- Class blog (post uploaded once per week; 200-300 words) 30%
- 1 longer paper (6-9 pages) 25%
- Contribution to *Kindred London* research project 15%
- Good preparation, regular attendance, substantive participation 30%

Procedural

Each session (aside from our opening one) will be centered around discussion of the novel we are reading. So dialogue and literary critical debate will be the core experiences in the class. But each time, I will also introduce some material that I think can help enrich our sense of London. Sometimes this material will be poetry, sometimes art and photography, sometimes other kinds of writing, such as memoir or essay, sometimes historical writing. You won’t need to prepare or read in advance this extra material – I will share it with you in class and we will just talk about it in real time.
In order that the course be a meaningful one for you, it is vital that you do the reading before each class.

Starting immediately, every week in weeks 1-9 each class member will upload a short blog post to the class blog by 8:00 pm on Friday at the latest. The posts will be viewable by the class but by no-one else. This means that over the course of the quarter each person will contribute a total of nine posts. Five of your posts should be thoughts about the books we’re reading; the other four should involve some of your own independent explorations and should be about any of the following topics: London art, London photography, London politics, London history or a visit to London.

Another component of the class will be a contribution to research on the *Kindred London* project. This won’t be very time-consuming and we’ll go into the details in class, but this assignment will give you a chance to do some supervised, original academic research on London.

Please double space your final paper, use 12 pt type and standard margin sizes. No late work is accepted without prior notification to me given well in advance. In cases of doubt or discrepancy, the online version of the syllabus at the class's Canvas site should be considered the latest and most authoritative version.

**Students with Documented Disabilities**  
Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066 URL: [http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae](http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae)).

**Honor Code**  
The class adheres firmly to the practices outlined in Stanford's Honor Code ([http://registrar.stanford.edu/bulletin/5471.htm](http://registrar.stanford.edu/bulletin/5471.htm)). The Honor Code is the University's statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work:

- The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:
  - that they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;
  - that they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that
others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.

- The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.

- While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

Lecture and Reading Schedule

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Session/Time-frame</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>April 4</td>
<td><strong>Prologue</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prologue – London history, London geography, London themes</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td><strong>1907-1940</strong></td>
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<td>11</td>
<td><strong>1907-1940</strong></td>
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<td>13</td>
<td><strong>1907-1940</strong></td>
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<td>Virginia Woolf, <em>Mrs Dalloway</em> (1925)</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td><strong>1907-1940</strong></td>
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<td>Virginia Woolf, <em>Mrs Dalloway</em> (1925)</td>
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<td><strong>1941-1973</strong></td>
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<td>27</td>
<td><strong>1941-1973</strong></td>
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<td>Samuel Selvon, <em>The Lonely Londoners</em> (1956)</td>
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<td>May 2</td>
<td><strong>1941-1973</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Finishing</td>
<td>Final paper due (7-10 pages)</td>
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**Bibliography**

[the literature from, and on, London in all its aspects is gigantic – this is just a tiny]
sampling of material]

**General history:**


**Historical atlases:**


**Online map resources:**
for contemporary London, see Google Maps (+ Street View): https://maps.google.com

for a more historical London, see the Ordnance Survey of London (1893-96), at the National Library of Scotland’s site: https://goo.gl/3lT8Jf

**Encyclopedia:**

**Other classics of London fiction from this period:** [some books we just don’t have time for]

Graham Greene, *The Ministry of Fear* (1943)

Patrick Hamilton, *Hangover Square* (1941)


Zadie Smith, *NW* (2012)