

## ENGLISH 240A/340A

### Crooks, Quacks, and Courtesans: Jacobean City Comedy Wednesday 10.30am-1.20pm

(Preliminary syllabus – subject to change)

#### Karen Britland

Office hours: Monday 4.30-5.30pm and by appointment

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#### Course Description

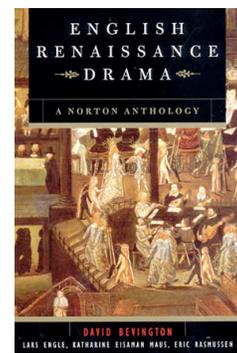
The course will focus on the ways in which criminality was defined and represented in early seventeenth-century London, exploring the themes of social mobility and social relations, economic expansion, prostitution, disease, and the built environment. We will read a number of plays set in or around the city, by playwrights such as Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, and John Marston. We will also look at contemporary poems and printed documents that deal with London and its environs, as well as considering a small amount of manuscript material in the form of wills and parish registers. During the term, we will draw on the work of cultural geographers, historians, and literary scholars to provide a critical framework for talking and writing about the metropolitan drama of the early Stuart period.

#### By the end of the module, students will have attained:

- \*an understanding of the ways in which criminality was variously defined, questioned, and sometimes celebrated in early modern London;
- \*an understanding of the ways in which cultural discourses do not just reflect external social circumstances, but also help to shape those circumstances;
- \*an understanding of the range and diversity of printed and manuscript material available to scholars of early modern London;
- \*an ability to close-read, interpret, analyse, and compare “literary” and traditionally “non-literary” sources, at the same time as interrogating the definitions of the “literary” and “non-literary;”
- \*an ability to construct a concise, written argument that engages with a range of primary and secondary sources;
- \*experience of presenting a conference-length paper to a politely critical audience.

#### Course Texts:

All the primary texts for this course (with the exception of Jonson’s poems, Hester Pulter’s poems, and *The Dutch Courtesan*) are to be found in *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington (Norton, 2002): ISBN-13 978-0393976557. Other material, including the text of *The Dutch Courtesan*, will be available online or as emailed electronic texts.



### **Class Participation and Attendance:**

Class attendance and participation is mandatory. Each class will begin with a short presentation by a class member, followed by discussion. You are expected to participate fully in the post-presentation discussion. Your participation grade (50% of your course grade) depends on this. **Please contact Karen Britland ([britland@startmail.com](mailto:britland@startmail.com)) in advance if you are going to miss a class.** All absences will result in a reduction of your grade but if you miss two or more classes because of circumstances beyond your control you are permitted *one* make-up assignment. (Ask Karen Britland for more details.)

### **Class Schedule:**

Week 1

Sept 27 (W)

Introduction to the course: defining virtue; defining the criminal.

We will discuss the life and times of early modern playwright, Ben Jonson, alongside his country-house poem, "To Penshurst," and a selection of poems from his collection of "Epigrams." (This material will be provided as hand-outs in the class.) Jonson has a very well-defined understanding of the good and the bad, the country and the city. We will look at his work and use his definitions as a way of structuring the course as a whole.

Week 2

Oct 4 (W)

Ben Jonson, *Volpone*

In this class we will read Jonson's 1606 play, *Volpone*, which is set in Venice, one of the most bustling and cosmopolitan cities in Europe at the time. In many ways, Venice comes to stand in the play for what London is likely to become. Jonson's ideas about virtue and criminality are clearly to be seen in this play, and we will discuss the ways in which anxieties about city living are starting to come to the fore in English drama.

Week 3

Oct 11 (W)

Hester Pulter's anti-London poetry

In this class we will look at some anti-London poetry by the recently discovered female poet Hester Pulter, who was writing in the 1640s and 1650s, during the English civil wars and interregnum. Pulter's work is fascinating, but this will be a short class because I have to give a talk at CMEMS at 12 noon. You are invited to the talk, but I will also provide extra office hours during the term to make up the lost class time.

Week 4

Oct 18 (W)

John Marston, *The Dutch Courtesan*

John Marston's play, *The Dutch Courtesan* (1605), slightly predates Jonson's *Volpone* (and, in several ways, *Volpone* responded to it). It is about a prostitute called Francheschina who is thrown over by her lover, Freevill, and who decides to take her revenge. We will read this play and also look at some records of trials for soliciting and prostitution from the same period that are recorded in the Bridewell Court Books (available online, but I'll also provide transcriptions).

Week 5

Oct 25 (W)

Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*

We're back to Ben Jonson this week to look at his 1610 play, *The Alchemist*. This is set in London during a plague epidemic, so we'll be picking up on *The Dutch Courtesan*'s fears about over-crowding, disease and criminality as we investigate early modern ideas about masters and servants, the (bumbling and avaricious) elite and the (witty and unscrupulous) working class.

Week 6

Nov 1 (W)

Middleton and Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*

Middleton and Dekker's play, which was published in 1611, is about a woman who dresses up in men's clothes and who swaggers around London. She sits on a borderline between masculinity and femininity, and between respectability and criminality. We'll be talking about that.

Week 7

Nov 8 (W)

Ben Jonson, *Epicene, or The Silent Woman*

This is a play from 1609-10 about the younger generation trying to hoodwink the older generation. We'll read the play and think again about the ways in which playwrights from this period (who were writing plays to be acted on an all-male stage) played with cross-dressing to surprise and challenge their audiences.

Week 8

Nov 15 (W)

Thomas Middleton, *A Chaste Maid In Cheapside*

We'll start this class by looking at some parish registers that really bring home the population explosion that happened in London between the 1590s and 1613 (when this play was performed). We'll then look at the way the play represents children and inheritance, also considering modern theoretical notions of cultural capital and the way they are manifested in the play.

Nov 22 (W) Thanksgiving (no class)

Week 9

Nov 29 (W)

Philip Massinger, *A New Way To Pay Old Debts*

This play, printed in 1633, is fascinating for the ways in which it represents the country and the city, juxtaposing an older way of living based on obligation and family allegiance against a new way of living based on legal contract and self-interest. We'll discuss this play and we'll look at some wills from the period to investigate how networks of obligation and debt structured rural and city societies.

Week 10

Dec 6 (W)

This week, we'll have a mini-conference at which you will all present a short version of your final papers. Your presentation can be done in person, or you can present it as a video. We'll decide on the length of the presentations once we know how many people are in the class. They are likely to be between 15 and 20 minutes. You are absolutely welcome to ask me for advice and help with the presentation and/or the final paper at any point during the term.

### **Assessment and Grading**

1. 50% class participation, including the final presentation at the mini-conference;
2. 50% research essay, no more than 15 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font, **due on 13 December 2017.**

**PLEASE NOTE:** It is your responsibility to ensure that your work is delivered to Professor Britland on or before the due date, and in a file format that Professor Britland can open, read and annotate. **Please submit your work in a .doc, or .docx file.** Pages files and .pdf files will only be accepted in extenuating circumstances. Any work that cannot be opened will be considered unsubmitted and therefore late. Late papers will be marked down by half a grade for every calendar day past the due date. Computer malfunction is not a valid excuse for the non-submission of a paper. Please keep back-ups of your work and consider submitting your paper early to avoid last-minute problems.

If you have not submitted your written assignment by **midnight on 15 December 2017 at the very latest**, you will automatically fail the course.

**Students with documented disabilities:** Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) located within the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). SDRC 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 SDRC as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066).