

Myth, metamorphosis and underground London narratives. Speed Writing.

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Background

London has had, from the very beginning, two tales spun about it. Like most capital cities, it is a place of wonder and possibility. It is also, however, a city of plague and fire. From the Middle Ages upto the Renaissance, the plagues and fires that tore away at this city killed numerous of its citizens and repeatedly destroyed its infrastructure.

London has also always been a site of crime, both informal and organised. And this is the second form of plague it is infested by.

There is an urban myth (perhaps true, perhaps not) that London is still home to more rats per square mile than human beings. In this course, we will be looking at another sort of rat, the kind that takes human form. For it is with rats, evil, that drama is born.

As we examine London's underbelly, rife as it is with crime, we will also ask how and when people have unjustly been portrayed as rats and as such, been hunted. In this latter category fall Jews, Catholics and modern immigrants.

The purpose of this course is as follows:

1. To read great literature and study myth to see how stories are crafted and can be crafted
2. To read crime novels and dramatic works to show how to begin a story in the middle, and how to maintain pace
3. To commit to practicing the art of writing on a weekly basis, with the production, at the end of this course, of a final short-story
4. To see how the rules of creative writing- dramatic openings, logical sequence, tight conclusions apply to all writing
5. To gain an understanding of this other darker side of London.

You may be:

1. Someone who wants to learn/extend their practice of the craft of writing
2. A literature major who wants to enhance his/her analysis skills of literary texts
3. Someone who wants to write more felt/dramatic/structured academic writing assignments (all writers- fictional, factual, academic, bloggers- use the same tool box)
4. A Business major who understands that creating/building a business is also about telling good stories
5. Someone who loves crime fiction.

Have a listen to our work:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4xjqw2Tz4M>

and

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q21bYdgzDDQ>

Myth and metamorphosis

Myth is at the heart of story-telling. Early narratives, including those of Homer and those found in religious texts are replete with great stories. We will be reading from the following texts:

1. 'The Bible'
2. Robert Graves' 'Greek Myths'
3. Joseph Campbell's 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces'
4. Robert Bly's 'Iron John'

Course breakdown

Week 1

Introductions

What we are doing and why

Assigned reading: 'The uncommon reader' by Alan Bennett

Week 2

Background on London

Reading an extract from Stephen King's 'On writing'

Week 3

London walk

Assigned reading: The myth of Talesin (to be sent via e-mail)

Week 4

Reading from Joseph Campbell (hand-outs). Discussing the power of myth; how it is used in literature and how to use it in one's work

Watching the opening of 'Artificial Intelligence' and analysing its themes from the point of view of myths

Assigned reading: The opening chapters of 'Broken Arrow' by Ismail Kadare.

Week 5

Further analysis of mythical structures

Analysis of 'Broken Arrow'

Assigned reading: 'He died with his eyes open', a British noir novel by Derek Raymond.

Week 6

Cinema trip

Week 7

Further analysis of mythical structures

Analysis of 'He died with his eyes open'.

Assigned reading: A myth from Robert Graves' 'Greek Myths' or a story from the Bible/ Qur'an/Torah etc.

Week 8

Class presentations of your takes on a classical myth/story

Visit the London Museum or the National Portrait Gallery or to a talk by a writer.

Week 9

Class test

Assigned reading: A short story by Ursula Le Guin or Angela Carter (as a print-out) and a selection from 'Othello'

Week 10

Analysis of the assigned reading.

Watching some of 'Omkhara', an Indian version of 'Othello' and analysing textual and cinematic interpretations.

Assigned reading: 'Oedipus' by Sophocles.

Week 11

Analysis of 'Oedipus'.

Submission of final essays.

Week 12

Practice-run and recording of final essays.

Further reading (optional) Texts on writing.

1. Stephen King's 'On Writing'
2. Christopher Volger's 'The Writer's Journey'
3. Interviews from the Paris Review
4. Zadie Smith's 'Changing my Mind'
5. Italo Calvino's 'Why Read the Classics'
6. Milan Kundera's 'The Art of the Novel'

Trips

1. Theatre trip
2. Dance trip
3. Walking tour
4. Film at a London cinema

Use of non-material texts:

By all means, read books/texts online and bring in your laptops and other devices to class.

Grade breakdown

Students need not be literature students but they should have a yen for writing or a strong desire to try. You are encouraged to submit a piece of work- however long or short you- every week. This will be read and commented upon but not be graded.

But because this course begins with the premise that you must know in order to do, there will be a test on the texts we are studying

- This will be on the thematic issues we have discussed and will be worth 20% of the final grade
- A final essay of 2,000—2,500 words will make up the remaining 80%. This will be due in two weeks before the last class in order to give me time to edit the stories for publication.

Web-site:

I am in the process of starting a web-site where the work of all our writing students will be- as long as they agree- be displayed

Last class

- During the last class we will film our video/make our podcast.