

Sensing the City

English 051 Section 001 Spring 2016
TR 1:30-3 PM, Fisher-Bennett Hall 201

Prof. Steinlight

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Office hours: Thurs. 10-12 or by appointment

Course Description

From Thomas De Quincey's opium-fueled adventures amid London's crowds to Arthur Conan Doyle's detective stories, urban experience has provided no end of material for the literary imagination. This course will consider how nineteenth-century literature helped transform the city into the symbolic nerve center of modern social life. Among our key topics will be the sensory dimensions of urbanism. We will discuss the city's effects on the senses as well as artists' and social scientists' varied efforts to make the internal dynamics of cities perceptible, whether in the form of still and moving images, sound, maps, lyric poetry, or narrative. As we read Romantic and Victorian writing in particular, we will also consider the paradoxes of urban representation: scenes of unity and of alienation, of newfound freedom and new forms of oppression, of total knowledge and impenetrable mystery, of the enforcement of social norms and their violation. To make sense of these conflicting meanings, we will examine what versions of the city take shape in fiction by Charles Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe, Honoré de Balzac, Virginia Woolf, and Richard Wright; poetry by William Blake, William Wordsworth, Charles Baudelaire, Walt Whitman, and Edna St. Vincent Millay; photography, Impressionist painting, film, and contemporary writing and media. We will discuss the practice of spectatorship, the poetics and politics of urban space, urban cartography and the rhetoric of exploration, socioeconomic stratification and racial segregation, architecture and infrastructure, representations of crowds and of bodily proximity to strangers, gender and sexuality in the city, new modes of perception and cognition, scientific analyses of built environments, and a range of artistic responses to the world-transforming conditions of modernity.

Required Texts

Honoré de Balzac, *Père Goriot* (trans. A. J. Krailsheimer; Oxford, 2009; ISBN 9780199538751)
Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (Penguin Classics, 2003; ISBN 9780141439679)
Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen* (trans. Louise Varèse, New Directions, 1970; ISBN 9780811200073)
Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oxford, 2008; ISBN 9780199535989)
Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Harcourt Annotated Edition, 2005; ISBN 9780156030359)
Richard Wright, *Native Son* (Harper Perennial, 2005; ISBN 9780060837563)

All books can be purchased at the Penn Book Center (130 South 34th St)

* Additional readings will be available electronically on the Canvas course site

Assignments and Course Requirements

Two 4-6pp papers (20% each)
Final 6-8pp paper or project (30%)
Active participation in class discussions (20%)
Presentation (10%)

Course Policies

Attendance

This course requires not just your attendance at all class meetings but your presence in the full sense of the word. Be awake, engaged, and ready to participate, with the assigned reading completed and the text(s) in front of you. Advance notice is required if you will need to be excused due to religious observance, participation in a sport or other official University activity, illness, or personal emergency. Since I understand that things sometimes come up at the last minute, I will spot you two unexcused absences without penalty. More than two will substantially lower your final grade. Except under extraordinary circumstances, more than five will result in a failing grade in the course.

Preparation

In addition to reading the texts attentively by the dates indicated below, the best way to prepare for class is to think in advance about questions that emerge from what you have read. Come with notes on specific passages of text that interest you and at least one question that you would like to discuss.

Participation

Sounding out your ideas in class on a regular basis is not only an excellent way to demonstrate the effort you are putting into this course; it's also crucial to the learning process. For that reason, vocal participation is required. Your contribution to discussions will be reflected in your final grade.

Electronic Devices

Class sessions demand your full attention. Electronic devices must be turned off and put away at all times to avoid distraction and disruption. Students texting in class will be marked absent for the day.

Your Learning Needs

You are always welcome to come to my scheduled office hours to discuss anything related to the course. Other meeting times can also be arranged. If you require accommodation for a diagnosed disability, please notify me privately and provide documentation at the beginning of the semester.

Submission of Written Work

Papers should be submitted electronically on Canvas by 1:30PM on the day they are due. Unless you have made special arrangements with me no less than 48 hours in advance of the due date, any work submitted late will automatically be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade per day for the first three days. Papers submitted more than three days late will not be accepted.

Grading

Assignment guidelines and grading criteria will be available on Canvas. Please note that grades cannot be changed without a rewrite (allowed only for grades of C or lower unless otherwise stated).

Academic Integrity

All of the work that you submit or present in class is expected to be the product of your own ideas, composed independently in your own original language (with appropriate citation of external sources, where necessary), and written solely for this course. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or about how to use external sources, speak with me before submitting your work. All cases of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade and possible disciplinary action.

Schedule of Class Meetings

WEEK 1

Thurs., Jan. 14

General introduction

* Radiolab episode 8.4: “Cities” (podcast)

WEEK 2 Becoming a Spectator

Tues., Jan. 19

* Joseph Addison, *The Spectator* No. 1 & No. 69

* William Blake, “London”

Thurs., Jan. 21

* William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), Book VII: “Residence in London”

WEEK 3 Environments

Tues., Jan. 26

* Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life”

Thurs., Jan. 28

Honoré de Balzac, *Père Goriot*, pp. 1-82

WEEK 4 The Price of Things

Tues., Feb. 2

Père Goriot, pp. 83-206

Thurs., Feb. 4

Père Goriot, pp. 207-263

WEEK 5 Buildings, Bodies, Machines

Paper 1 due Mon., Feb. 8

Tues., Feb. 9

* Edwin Chadwick, selections from *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*

* Friedrich Engels, selections from *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (“The Great Towns”)

* William Acton, “Prostitution Defined”

Thurs., Feb. 11

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, pp. 9-108

WEEK 6 Force of Habit

Tues., Feb. 16

Hard Times, 111-212

PM Screening: *Modern Times* (dir. Charlie Chaplin, 1936)

Thurs., Feb. 18

Modern Times

* Henri Lefebvre, “The Everyday and Everydayness”

WEEK 7

Tues., Feb. 23

Hard Times, 215-288

Thurs., Feb. 25

* Matthew Arnold, "Lines Written in Kensington Gardens"

* Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"

WEEK 8 Walking

Tues., Mar. 1

* Michel de Certeau, selections from *The Practice of Everyday Life* ("Walking in the City"; "Spatial Stories")

* Henry Mayhew, selections from *London Labour and the London Poor*

Thurs., Mar. 3

* Edgar Allan Poe, "The Man of the Crowd"

* Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies-Cities"

Spring Term Break: March 5-13

WEEK 9 Love at Last Sight

Tues., Mar. 15

Charles Baudelaire, selected poems from *Paris Spleen*: "To Arsène Houssaye," "Crowds," "Solitude," "Windows," "The Eyes of the Poor," "Counterfeit"

* Baudelaire, from *Les Fleurs du mal*: "To a Passerby"

* Elizabeth Wilson, selections from *The Sphinx in the City*

Thurs., Mar. 17

* Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century"; "Arcades," from *The Arcades Project*

* Impressionist art

* Photography

WEEK 10 Sexuality and the City

Tues., Mar. 22

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, pp. 3-91

* Carolyn Dever, "Everywhere and Nowhere"

Thurs., Mar. 24

Dorian Gray, pp. 92-188

WEEK 11

Tues., Mar. 29

* Edna St. Vincent Millay, selected sonnets

Paper 2 due

Thurs., Mar. 31

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, pp. 3-90

WEEK 12 Modernism/Modernity

Tues., Apr. 5

Mrs. Dalloway, pp. 91-190

Thurs., Apr. 7

* Le Corbusier, "The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning"
Man with a Movie Camera (dir. Dziga Vertov, 1929)

WEEK 13 Race, Space, Movement

Tues., Apr. 12

Richard Wright, *Native Son*, pp. 3-93

Proposal due

Thurs., Apr. 14

Native Son, pp. 95-241

WEEK 14

Tues., Apr. 19

Native Son, pp. 241-340

Thurs., Apr. 21

Native Son, pp. 340-430

WEEK 15 Whose Streets?

Tues., Apr. 26

* Guy Debord, "Theory of the *Dérive*"

* David Harvey, "The Right to the City"

Reading Period Apr. 28-29

Final Paper/Project due Thurs., May 5 by 1:30PM