

# **Death & Dungeons in Past and Present England**

**CCSA Study Abroad: London Summer 2018**

## **Instructor**

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## **Contact Information**

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## **Course Description**

This course is designed to introduce students to the history of the cultural approaches to death in England and, by extension, wider Western culture. We'll begin by looking at how death and the human corpse were interpreted in ancient times, including the disposition of war casualties, the depiction of death in ancient literature, and trends in memorial design.

Next we'll look at how the Scientific Revolution both shifted the culture toward a more clinical approach to death, while at the same triggering a rise in interest in dissection, "body snatching," and the supernatural. Students will also learn the origins of the English Elegy and how this helped pattern the grieving process for Western culture.

In the last two weeks of the course we'll talk about the origins of the medicalized approach to death that is part of contemporary Western culture, then discuss current death-related issues such the shifting patterns of suicide in both the UK and the US, the debates over physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia, and the current controversies over healthcare and its approach to end-of-life treatment. Students will also consider the new, postmodern elegies where the dead don't seem dead to the reader at all.

Through this course, students will understand how human beings are psychologically and culturally "wired" to respond to death and dead bodies, and how Western culture's current state of "death denial" is attempting to circumvent these limits, thus changing how we live, how we grieve, and how we die.

In order to accomplish this, the goals of the course are to:

- introduce students to the anthropological and psychological concepts that create liminal objects and spaces, a key concept in understanding the taboo nature of death and the human corpse.
- explore London's persistent fascination with its tragic and sometimes macabre history, including discussions of memorial architecture and visits to such important historical sites as the Jurassic Coast, Beachy Head, the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey, and the highly successful modern tourist attraction, The London Dungeon.
- familiarize students with the elegy form and follow the evolution of this poetry of mourning from ancient times to the present, identifying which cultural shifts in our approach to death are reflected in this evolution.
- identify and analyze the concept of "death denial" and how this cultural movement is affecting our approach to death, commemoration, and burial. This will include considerations of the supernatural/paranormal through visits to such sites as Warwick Castle, reputedly to be one of the most haunted locations in all of the United Kingdom.
- consider contemporary controversial issues such as physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia, end-of-life treatment, the spike in suicides worldwide, and the destruction of memorial sites and other sites of commemoration.
- learn and understand the differences between memorials and counter- or anti-memorials and how these reflect shifting Western attitudes about death.
- introduce the concepts of social memory and post-memory and how literature and art are helping to redefine our relationship with death and dying.

**NOTE:** This course qualifies students for an English Literature credit (ENG200 on the Bellarmine University campus) or as an Interdisciplinary or elective credit (IDC301 on the Bellarmine University campus).

### **Reading List**

- Andrews, Ross. *The Paranormal Tourist Guide to London*. London: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2013.
- Gitting, Clare and Peter C. Jupp *Death in England: An Illustrated History*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000.
- Ramazani, Jahan. *The Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

- Roach, Mary. *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Cadavers*. New York: W.W. Norton & Sons, 2004.
- A course pack of literary and interdisciplinary articles (to be emailed to students prior to the start of the course)

All texts are available on Amazon.com. E-book versions of texts are fine (and perhaps preferable, given weight limits on suitcases and the cumbersome nature of carrying books on tours and other excursions), but you must be able to carry the device on which you are reading them (Kindles, iPads, iPhones) with you to class and excursions.

### **Supplies**

- Pens or pencils
- Kindle, iPad, smartphone with text-reading capability (if using e-book versions of texts)
- standard 8 1/2' x 11" lined notebook for journals. Spiral or bound. Moleskins or other small journals are not appropriate for this use, though you are, of course, free to keep a separate journal in one of these types of journals.
- lined notebook paper for essays (if you are not emailing assignments)

### **Additional Costs**

Some of students' CCSA program fees are set aside to cover costs of excursions that are part of the course experience. However, any costs that are not covered by these fees will be the responsibility of the student. Please keep this in mind when using your BritRail passes for personal travel and while considering your budget for the four weeks. Your professor will not be able to cover your expenses, so if you are unable to pay for admission or travel, you will miss the scheduled event.

We will have further information on any additional costs closer to the start of the course.

### **Grading**

Weekly Journal: 30%  
 Short Essays on Excursions and/or readings: 30%  
 Final Exam: 30%  
 Class Participation: 10%

### **Grading Scale for this Course**

A+ (100-98) = exceptional  
 A (97-95) = excellent  
 A- (94-93) = superior  
 B+ (92-90) = very good

B (89-88) = strong and somewhat superior  
 B- (87-84) = strong work  
 C+ (83-78) = good work  
 C (77-75) = average work  
 C- (74-70) = slightly below average work  
 D+ (69-68) = below average work  
 D (67-65) = passing work  
 D- (64-60) = barely passing work  
 F (59-0) = failing work

**Weekly Journal --** Students will write a substantive (2-3 page) journal entry for each week of the program detailing not only their thoughts on the course material for the week but also some of their thoughts on their experiences as a Study Abroad student exploring London. These may be typed and emailed to your professors or handed in handwritten (legibly!) on lined paper. They are due no later than Friday at 5:00 p.m. of each week and will be returned each Monday during class.

For grading, I am looking for thoughtful responses to your week's work and to your experiences for the week. These may be very informal in terms of style and content, and you are free to discuss anything you'd like with your professor related to your experiences. Other students will not be reading these, so feel free to open up!

**Short Essays –** You will be assigned a 2-3 page critical essay each week. Prompts will be related to course concepts and will ask you to apply these to literary works, historical events, excursions, or other artifacts.

For grading, I am looking for clear understanding of course concepts and thoughtful, diligent responses. The essays should also meet the length requirement. These are due the Monday of each week at the start of class, except for the final week.

**Final Exam –** The final exam for this course will take place before we leave London. It will encompass the course readings, visual texts, excursions, and course-related site visits and experience. It will consist of multiple choice and short answer components.

**Attendance and Participation –** CCSA courses have a mandatory attendance policy unless there is a medical emergency that requires actual medical intervention. This means that you must attend all class meetings and course-related excursions. Any student who misses a class meeting or excursion will be dropped a full letter grade on his/her final grade for each event missed.

You are also expected to participate constructively in our class meetings and excursions by responding to readings and other texts and by adding your voice to our class discussions as appropriate. Behavior that is distracting or disrespectful to your professor, your peers, or your British hosts will result in a reduction of your participation grade. Disruptive, rude, or dangerous behavior while we are on excursions or trips will result in you being sent to your CCSA administrators for further action.

### **Academic Honesty**

Academic honesty and turning in original work is vitally important – both academically and ethically – in all of your courses. Students must be fully aware of what constitutes academic dishonesty; claims of ignorance cannot be used to justify or rationalize dishonest acts.

Academic dishonesty can take a number of forms, including but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, aiding and abetting another student's academic dishonesty, multiple submissions of one's own work for grades, obtaining unfair advantage on an assignment or test, and unauthorized access to academic or administrative systems. The instructor's choice of penalty ranges from a minimum penalty of failing the assignment or test to failing the course itself, depending on the severity of the violation.

### **Disability Accommodation**

Students seeking special accommodation must provide CCSA with a copy of the letter on file with their own Office of Disability Services, outlining what services they receive on their home campus.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### **Week 1: Death and the Ancients**

This week we'll discuss British ancient history, including ancient death practices. We'll also explore the concepts of liminality and the creation of liminal space (including literary "space") and how this affects our attitudes toward death.

Excursion #1: British Museum, Natural History Museum

Excursion #2: Jurassic Coast Tour, Dorset (requires BritRail Pass)

### **Week 2: Death's "Renaissance"**

We'll move from ancient times to the Medieval and Renaissance periods and look at the rise in capital punishment, torture, and death for political purposes. We'll learn the English Elegy's elements and how this poetic form was meant to imitate the mourning process. We'll also explore the rise of interest in the supernatural during this period.

Excursion #1: Tower of London, London Dungeons

Excursion #2: Warwick Castle, Warwick (requires BritRail Pass)

### Week 3: Queen Victoria and Death Enters the Modern Age

This week will explore the legacy of mourning left by Queen Victoria and the Victorian Age with visits to memorials to her husband, Prince Albert, and other memorials in London. This week will also be dedicated to shifts in the elegy form as the secularization of Western culture triggers “The Mortality Revolution” and a new fascination with death, commemoration, and the afterlife.

Excursion #1: Memorial Walk, Bart’s Anatomy Museum

Excursion #2: Jack the Ripper Walking Tour

### Week 4: Death in the Postmodern Age

This week we’ll bring our discussions to a close by looking at current death-related controversies such as suicide, end-of-life treatment’s impact on healthcare, physician-assisted suicide, social media and death, and depictions of death and mourning in contemporary literature and visual art.

Excursion #1: Wellcome Collection, Tate Modern Museum, and British Library

Excursion #2: Beachy Head, Sussex Coast (requires BritRail Pass)

## **ABOUT YOUR PROFESSOR**

Dr. Amy Tudor holds both a M.F.A. in poetry and a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Humanities, specializing in thanatology. She has been teaching both creative writing and courses in Death Studies through the English Department and the Interdisciplinary Core Program at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky since 2008. She has traveled extensively in the United Kingdom and Ireland since 1988, and this is her third CCSA London Study Abroad course.