Detecting England: Narrating Crime in British Media

“Detecting England: Narrating Crime in British Media” (LTWL 172GS) would focus on the British crime genre across media, from newspapers to literature and television, with particular attention to the role of geography in these narratives. Making distinct use of the city of London, we would wander through the actual landscapes of the texts we read and watch, creating a kind of intimacy with the city and the media we consume, that would not be possible studying these same texts in San Diego. The course would examine historic and contemporary British crime narratives, from the Victorian-era production of Jack the Ripper as a media sensation (Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*) and the advent and use of crime photography in Victorian London (Alan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive”), through contemporary British crime dramas like *Bletchley Circle*, *Prime Suspect*, and *Luther*. Our first excursion, then, would take us through a Jack the Ripper tour, wherein we could analyze the commodification of violence and its reproduction in the city space--what does it mean, for instance, to continue to narrate and commodify these crimes as tourist attractions? Through walking tours, delving deeply into literature, media, and theory about violence and place, students would develop a unique intimacy linking media texts with their own understandings of how spaces are constructed, what they mean, and how media affects how we move through space, dependant on gender, race, sexuality, class, and more.

Course Goals:

- Develop critical and close reading analysis skills, especially in reference to questions of genre and genre conventions of the British detective story.
- Understand the historical, social, and political contexts for the emergence and lasting power of the detective genre in British literature.
- Develop an ability to analyze and understand the production of landscape, from city to rural, in British literature and media.
- Understand how race, gender, and violence intersect with and construct ideas of British landscapes.

Assignments:

Synthesis Papers (4 total; 10% each = 40%): Each week students will write short response papers that synthesize the week’s screenings and readings. (Word count 500-700 words)

Final Paper (40%): Revise & Expand one of the synthesis papers, using feedback from professor and peers. This paper will also incorporate additional information from the course, asking students to integrate readings and screenings across the course. In it they will have the opportunity to explore a topic of their choice and do a little independent research.

Participation (20%): Students will be graded on how they participate in class (whether they are prepared, attentive, and engaged in the course discussions). Students will also bring daily discussion questions based on the reading and screenings.
Course Calendar

Week 1: Histories of Violence & Genre
Monday: Introductions & Course Intro
Tuesday: Race, Gender, and Violence in the City
  Read: Judith Walkowitz, “Jack the Ripper”
  Clips: Ripper Street
Wednesday: Read: Tom Gunning, “Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detectives, & Early Cinema”
  Watch (in class): The Bletchley Circle (Pilot)
Thursday: Excursion
  Synthesis Paper #1 Due
Other additional readings & excerpts this week from Dickens

Week 2: Criminality & the “Science” of Crime
Monday: Mapping Criminality
  Read: Alan Sekula, “The Body & the Archive” (pgs 3-30)
Tuesday: Read: Alan Sekula, “The Body & the Archive” (finish)
Wednesday: Watch (in class): Sherlock (Pilot)
Thursday: Excursion
  Synthesis Paper #2 Due

Week 3: The Dangerous City & The Detective
Monday: Crime & The City
  Read: Sue Turnbull, “Gritty Realism: The British Police Procedural”
Tuesday: Women & the City
  Read: Sue Turnbull, “Women in Crime”
  Watch (in class): Prime Suspect (Pilot)
Wednesday: Race & the City
  Watch (in class): Luther, Pilot
Thursday: Excursion
  Synthesis Paper #3 Due

Week 4: Rural Crime
Monday: Rural Crime
  Watch/Read: TBD
Tuesday: Rural Crime & Whiteness
  Watch (in class): Broadchurch, Pilot
Wednesday: Comedy & Violence in Rural British Mysteries
  Watch: Agatha Raisin, Pilot
Thursday: Weekend Excursion, Cotswolds & Stonehenge
  Synthesis Paper #4
Week 5: The Wrap Up
Monday: Rough Draft Final Paper Due/Peer Review/Work in Progress Talks
Tuesday: Workshop/Conferences
Wednesday: Workshop/Conferences
Thursday: Excursion & Final Paper Due