

Survey British Literature and Culture (part 6):
From the Second World War to the New Millennium
(#WueOnline)

Time: TUE 16-18 / 'Online course'

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Picking up from the lecture on 'Modernity and Modernism' (held in the summer semester 2020), this lecture will continue our series of surveys in literary and cultural history. It will offer an advanced introduction to the literatures and cultures of the British Isles (and some of Britain's former colonies) in the long period from the late 1930s to the second decade of the new millennium.

Programmatic context of the course: The lecture is part of a cycle of lectures that the Chair of English Literature and British Culture Studies (Lehrstuhl für Englische Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft) provides under the umbrella title 'Survey British Literature and Culture.' Designed to assist students in gaining a structured overview of the most important periods, developments, texts and phenomena in literary and cultural history, the cycle comprises a sequence of lectures that begins with the early modern period and progresses until the very present. The focus is on the literatures and cultures of the British Isles. However, a determinate effort will always be made to address the world-wide impact of British imperial policies and the evolution of Anglophone literatures all around the globe. A final lecture in the cycle (first to be offered in the winter semester of 2021/22) will then systematically discuss the New Literatures in English produced in the context of postcoloniality and migration.

READING REQUIREMENTS:

In preparation for the lecture (that is: before the first instalment of the lecture will be available online on 20/04), participants are strongly advised to read the respective sections in Paul Poplawski, ed., *English Literature in Context*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2017) – see especially the following chapter: John Brannigan, "The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries, 1939-2015" (541-618). All participants will need to have studied this chapter by the date of the first portfolio assignment.

In the course of the semester, students will be expected to read *at least TWO* of the following literary (key) texts:

- George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) // *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)
- Virginia Woolf, "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" (1940)
- Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (Engl. premiere in 1955)
- John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger* (1956)
- Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)
- John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969)

- Caryl Churchill, *Cloud Nine* (1979)
- Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)
- Sarah Kane, *Blasted* (1995)
- Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (2005)
- Zadie Smith, *NW* (2012)

The most important intention of the lecture is to offer students a basis for extensive self-directed reading of seminal literary texts and key scholarly accounts. The selected bibliography at the end of this syllabus provides first suggestions for such reading.

ORGANISING ONLINE TEACHING:

a) 'Distant' lecturing

Due to the continuing pandemic, the lecture will take place in the virtual realm. 'WUECAMPUS' will be the main site of transaction. Please visit the virtual course room immediately after registering for the lecture – and then at least once a week.

To a still larger extent than in a normal semester of live teaching, the learning progress of students will depend on their willingness and capacity for organizing themselves, making use of the materials provided on WueCampus, doing assigned readings, and following suggestions for further reading or research.

The lecture will be presented as a series of RECORDED 'SLIDE SHOWS WITH NARRATION.' These will be uploaded to WueCampus on a weekly basis: each new instalment should be available at the time for which the regular lecture is scheduled. Please download the 'slide show'/lecture and play it *within the same week*.

b) 'Distant' assessment

Instead of a final test, assessment will be according to the PORTFOLIO PRINCIPLE. In the course of the semester, there will be three portfolio assignments: one after the first third of the semester, one after the second third, and one set for the first examination week. These portfolio-assignments will consist in a mixture of tasks – as for example reporting on your reading progress, answering factual, conceptual, and interpretative questions based on the lecture, writing short analyses of texts dealt with in the lecture, etc.

Successful completion of the portfolio-assignments will depend on regular passive and active involvement in the course (i.e., listening to / watching the slide shows every week as well as reading literary and scholarly texts in the context of the lecture). Students will be asked to hand in their responses to the portfolio-assignments electronically (uploading their files to WueCampus) and at a specific date (see course programme below and announcements on WueCampus). In order to successfully pass the course, *all* portfolio assignments will need to be satisfactory.

PROGRAMME:

Please visit the WUECAMPUS course room immediately after registering for the lecture and then at least once a week.

DISCUSSION FORUM: For each course week/topic, there will be an open discussion forum on WueCampus. This is where you can and should post your comments and queries on the topics and concepts dealt with in the readings and lectures. Regular contributions will be appreciated. Please make sure to always read (and respond to) the posts provided by other members of the group.

The programme below lists only the TEXTS SELECTED as *key examples* for the purposes of this lecture. These texts, I believe, serve well in terms of 'representing' important dispositions or trends in the literature and culture of their times. Please, read and prepare as many of these texts as possible. Of course, the selection is determinedly and painfully restrictive. Other important texts will be mentioned in the lecture.

Week 1

TUE 20/04: **Introduction / The Thirties**

George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937)

❖ ASSIGNED READING: Brannigan, "The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries" 541-566

Week 2

TUE 27/04: **The Second World War and The Post-War Moment (1939-51)**

Virginia Woolf, "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" (1940)

Cecil Day Lewis, "Where Are the War Poets" (1943)

George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)

❖ ASSIGNED READING: Brannigan, "The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries" 566-593

Week 3

TUE 04/05: **The Fifties**

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (Engl. premiere 1955)

John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger* (1956)

❖ ASSIGNED READING: Brannigan, "The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries" 594-618

Week 4

MON 10/05: First portfolio assignment set

FRI 14/05, 11.59 p.m. (= midnight): First portfolio assignment due

Week 5

TUE 18/05: **The Sixties**

Philip Larkin, "Annus Mirabilis" (1967/1974)

Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)

Week 6

[TUE 25/05: No lecture – Pentecost break]

Week 7

TUE 01/06: **The Seventies**

Linton Kwesi Johnson, "Bass Culture" (1975/80)

John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969)

Week 8

TUE 08/06: Live Meeting & Discussion [Zoom]

Week 9

MON 14/06: Second portfolio assignment set

FRI 18/06, 11.59 p.m. (= midnight): Second portfolio assignment due

Week 10

TUE 22/06: **The Eighties**

Caryl Churchill, *Cloud Nine* (1979)

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)

Week 11

TUE 29/06: **The Nineties**

Sarah Kane, *Blasted* (1995)

Week 12

TUE 06/07: **The 'New Millennium'**

Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (2005)

Zadie Smith, *NW* (2012)

Week 13 (= 'first examination week')

MON 12/07: Third portfolio assignment set

FRI 16/07, 11.59 p.m. (= midnight): Third portfolio assignment due

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Titles that are especially recommended as first introductions to the field or as general study aids are marked with an asterisk: ★.

All titles listed are held by the Universitätsbibliothek Würzburg. Some can be accessed online (see information provided in the list). Wherever I think that students might generally profit from actually buying a title, I have indicated an approximate price (but this is not to say that the respective books *need* to be bought for taking part in the lecture).

1) Particularly useful as basic reading for the lecture:

- ★ Poplawski, Paul, ed. *English Literature in Context*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2017.

[C. € 29,-, but a used copy of the 1st edition would do almost as well.]

→ For the present lecture, see especially chapter 7 ("The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries, 1939-2015") and perhaps also chapter 8 ("Postcolonial Literature in English").

- ★ Vernon, James. *Modern Britain: 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2017).

[C. € 22,-.]

[Vernon offers a comprehensive survey of modern 'British' history that puts a particular emphasis on social history and social politics. Designed for (slightly advanced) students, this is certainly the best book of its kind.]

→ For the present lecture, see parts IV ("1931–1976: Society Triumphant") and V ("1976–: A New Liberalism?").

2) General reference:

- ★ See especially the various reference works accessible/searchable through the website *Oxford Reference*: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/>. [Accessible online through UBW.]

Nünning, Ansgar, ed. *Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie*. 5th ed. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2013. [Accessible online through UBW.]

3) Study aids in literary studies:

- ★ Baldick, Chris. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. 4th ed. Oxford UP, 2015. [Accessible online through UBW & *Oxford Reference*. / c. € 14,- / any used ed. will certainly do.]

Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. 1997. 2nd ed. Oxford: OUP, 2011. [Accessible online through UBW.]

4) General histories of literature etc.:

Nowak, Helge. *Literature in Britain and Ireland: A History*. Tübingen: Francke, 2010. [Accessible online through UBW.]

Seeber, Hans Ulrich, and Ingo Berensmeyer, eds. *Englische Literaturgeschichte*. 5th rev. ed. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2012. [Accessible online through UBW.]

5) Specific works on the literature of the 'period':

Bradbury, Malcolm. *The Modern British Novel*. 1993. London: Penguin, 1994.

[Still standard reading on the topic!]

Falci, Eric. *The Cambridge Introduction to British Poetry, 1945-2010*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015. [Accessible online through UBW.]

Görtschacher, Wolfgang, and David Malcolm, eds. *A Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Poetry, 1960-2015*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2021. [Accessible online through UBW.]

Nicol, Bran. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. [Accessible online through UBW.]

Nünning, Ansgar. *Der englische Roman des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Stuttgart: Klett, 1998.

6) History / Cultural history / 'Contexts':

Black, Jeremy. *A History of the British Isles*. 1996. 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003.

Cannon, John. *The Oxford Companion to British History*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997 [and later reissues/editions]. [Accessible online through UBW.]

★ Cunliffe, Barry, et al. *The Penguin Illustrated History of Britain and Ireland: From Earliest Times to the Present Day*. London: Penguin, 2004.

★ Higgins, Michael, Clarissa Smith, and John Storey, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. [Accessible online through UBW.]

Malpas, Simon. *The Postmodern. The New Critical Idiom*. London: Routledge, 2004. [Accessible online through UBW.]

McHale, Brian. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015. [Accessible online through UBW.]

Morgan, Kenneth O. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain*. 1984. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.

Morgan, Kenneth O. *Twentieth-century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. [Accessible online through UBW.]

Sandbrook, Dominic. *The Great British Dream Factory: The Strange History of Our National Imagination*. London: Allen Lane, 2015.

[→ This book makes for great and informative reading.]