Britain and the Second World War: Memory, Media, Literature

TUE 10-12 / #WueOnline

Students are urged to consult this syllabus before finally registering for the lecture course and then again in preparation for the first meeting.

[The illustration is a detail from Laura Knight’s A Balloon Site, Coventry, an oil painting done in 1942/43. There is a relatively informative Wikipedia article on the painting, offering a bit of context as well as a full reproduction of the artwork: LINK.]

TOPIC AND APPROACH:

Putting a special emphasis on both the novel form and (audio-)visual representations, the lecture investigates the reverberations of the Second World War in British literature and culture. Our perspective is informed by the history of memory, by media theory and by literary studies.

We will begin by discussing the immediate changes the war brought to British politics, society, and culture. The main focus will then be on the ways in which the events, experiences and discourses of the war period have been remembered or forgotten, reiterated or reformatted from 1945 to the immediate present of ‘Brexit Britain.’

The following questions will be particularly important:

- What long-term influences has war culture had on British political rhetorics and popular culture? Here, war-time discourses of mobilization and mediation are of particular interest.
- Which problems have occurred in referring to and in coming to terms with extreme violence? How, in particular, has the Holocaust been represented and remembered in the UK?
- What roles have cultural representations and performances – especially various forms of the novel and of film – played in these processes?

FORM OF THE LECTURE (#WueOnline)

The lecture will be held ONLINE (see Zoom link in the WueCampus course room) and LIVE, i.e. each Tuesday from 10.15 to 11.45 a.m. Please understand that it will not be possible to offer a recording of the lecture.
**Assessment**

Assessment will be through a **final test (Klausur)**. Successful participation in the test will depend on both continuous participation in the lecture and continuous reading in the context of the lecture (see AR texts below).

Depending on the general situation in July, the final test will be held either on site or electronically. The decision will be taken c. two weeks before the date of the test. In any case, the test will be held on TUE, the 26th of July, 14.00-16.00 (please note that this is a different time of day than the lecture itself!).

**Preparing for the lecture:**

*It is important that participants start preparing for the lecture during the semester break.*

Besides consulting pertinent histories and handbooks (such as, e.g., *The Oxford History of Britain*), students should read at least one – and ideally several – of the following novels before the beginning of the teaching period:

- Henry Green's *Back* (1946) or Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1948/49)
- J. G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* (1984) [*it might an idea to begin by reading this novel!*]
- W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001; German original or English translation)

**[Additional offer:] Accompanying reading and discussion course**

The lecture will be accompanied by a separate (and non-obligatory!) reading and discussion course (Übung: Lektürekurs und Begleitveranstaltung zur Vorlesung). Based on a manageable selection of 'primary' and 'secondary' readings as well as on extensive in-class discussions, this additional course will offer opportunities for coming to grips with as well as for delving deeper into the texts, films and topic/s dealt with in the lecture. It takes place in the time slot immediately following on the lecture: TUE, 12-14. In order to facilitate transition from one course to the other, the reading and discussion course will also be conducted 'online' (through 'Zoom').

**Programme**

AR = Assigned reading → Please read in preparation for the respective meeting! — Texts for (optional but strongly recommended) further reading will be announced in the course of the lecture.

03/05  **Introduction:**

*The Second World War | Memory | Figures or memory*


10/05  **Contexts:**

War history | Social history | Cultural history


17/05  **'War culture':**

Mobilisation | Media | Mediation


**IN FOCUS** (please watch in preparation for the meeting): Humphrey Jennings and Harry Watt (dirs.), *London / Britain Can Take It* (propaganda film, 1940). [The entire short film (c. 9 mins) can be watched on YouTube; choose the version posted by the National Archives UK: [LINK].]

24/05  **War-time literature:**

Complicating mediation

AR / **IN FOCUS**: Virginia Woolf, "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" (1940). [The full text of the essay in accessible on the website of the journal *The New Republic*: [LINK].]

31/05  **War-time cinema:**

Excessing propaganda?

**IN FOCUS** (please watch if you can): Michael Powell (book) and Emeric Pressburger (dir.), *A Canterbury Tale* (1944). [A full version of this notably 'strange' key film can watched on YouTube: [LINK].]

[07/06: *No lecture* ('Pentecost Tuesday')]

14/06  **Post-war popular/media culture:**

Standard figures of memory

AR:

1)  Mark Connelly, introduction, *We Can Take It!* (Pearson, 2004) 1-25. [Scan provided on WueCampus.]


**IN FOCUS** (please watch if you can): Guy Hamilton (dir.), *The Colditz Story* (1955). [Sadly, the movie is not easily available online at this moment.]
21/06  **Post-war literature:**
Idiosyncratic remembrance and the novel


IN FOCUS (please read if you can):

28/06  **Towards 'Memory Culture':**
A new discourse of remembrance


IN FOCUS (please listen / watch if you can): Pink Floyd, *The Wall* (music album 1979) / Alan Parker (dir.), *Pink Floyd's The Wall* (music film, 1982).

05/07  **Totalitarian violence & total imagination:**
J. G. Ballard


12/07  **Transnational Holocaust memory & the UK**


IN FOCUS (please read if you can): W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (2001 [both the German original and the English translation of the novel were published in this year; read either]).

19/07  **Re-assemblage & Wrap-up**


26/07, 14.00-16.00: **FINAL TEST**