

Britain and the Second World War: Audiovisual Formations and Literary Memory

Time: Thu 10-12 // Room: Philosophy building, Ü 6

Please consult this syllabus before registering for the seminar – and then again in preparing for our meetings (including the first meeting).



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

The seminar explores the reverberations of the Second World War in British literature and culture. Discussing novels as well as films, our perspective will be informed by memory studies, cultural and media studies as well as literary studies.

The seminar will first look at the 1930s and 1940s, examining the changes the war brought to British politics, society, and culture. Our focus will then be on the ways in which wartime events, experiences and discourses were remembered or forgotten, reiterated or reformatted between 1945 and 1990. Seminar work will be informed by the following questions:

- What long-term impact has war culture had on British political rhetoric and popular culture?
- What problems have occurred in coming to terms with or in adequately remembering not only extreme violence but also the experience of a media-driven cultural and social mobilization?
- What roles have cultural representations and performances – especially in the different forms of film and the novel – played in these processes?

PREPARATION FOR THE SEMINAR:

Before the beginning of the teaching period, participants need to obtain copies of the following novels:

- Henry Green, *Back* (1946), introd. by Deborah Eisenberg (New York Review of Books, 2016) [ISBN: 978-1681370101, c. € 10.-].
- J. G. Ballard, *Empire of the Sun* (1984; Simon & Schuster, 2005) [ISBN: 978-0743265232, c. € 18.-].

Participants are expected to use the semester break for adequate preparatory reading. Besides doing an appropriate amount of introductory reading on the topic of the seminar (see especially the texts by Connelly, Morgan, and Deer listed in the seminar programme below!), it is urgently recommended to read at least one of the assigned novels before the beginning of the teaching period.

PROGRAMME:

Please study the assigned texts and watch the listed films in preparing for seminar meetings. Make sure to always bring your annotated version of the assigned texts to class.

16/04 Introduction:**Britain & the Second World War | FIGURES OF MEMORY**

- Mark Connelly, introduction, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (Pearson, 2004) 1-25 [accessible online through UBW¹].
- ➔ While reading and preparing the text, you should consider both its significance *and* its limitations or openness to critique.
- ➔ On top of studying the text by Connelly, participants are asked to prepare by browsing and researching evidence of how the Second World War and the Holocaust have been remembered in British culture. It would be great if you might share your findings, musings and questions through the WUECAMPUS DISCUSSION FORUM – but I do not want to make this obligatory. // As a particularly suggestive cultural text, I suggest a double episode from the TV series *Doctor Who*: "The Empty Child" & "The Doctor Dances" (BBC, 2005) [clips (2 x 45 mins) openly accessible online]. (This is a suggestion for 'further viewing': watching is recommended but not obligatory.)

23/04 "London can take it":**The WAR, MOBILIZATION, and (film) MEDIA**

- Kenneth O. Morgan, "The Second World War," *The Oxford History of Britain*, rev. ed., ed. Morgan (Oxford UP, 2021) 620-633 [accessible online through UBW].
- Humphrey Jennings and Harry Watt (dirs.), *London / Britain Can Take It* (1940) [propaganda film; clips openly accessible].

¹ To access e-books from home, one often needs to be hooked up to the university's intranet through a VPN tunnel; see website of the Information Technology Centre (Rechenzentrum) on the procedure: [LINK](#).

30/04 **War culture and war-time literature:****MEDIATION and/vs. LITERARY COMPLICATIONS**

- Patrick Deer, introduction, *Culture in Camouflage: War, Empire, and Modern British Literature* (Oxford UP, 2009) 1-14 [WueCampus].
 - Virginia Woolf, "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" (1940) [WueCampus].
- ➔ Please ponder the relations between the scholarly text and the literary text. What is distinctly 'literary' about Woolf's approach and technique? How does it work as a response to what Connelly calls "war culture"? And how significant, would you say, are the two texts in relation to our contemporary life and culture? Be ready to explain your take on these questions in class.

07/05 **MEMORY | MEMORY STUDIES**

- Astrid Erll, "Introduction: Why 'Memory'?" *Memory in Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 1-12 [accessible online through UBW].
- ➔ Please, compose a chart of the most important concepts introduced in the text. Be prepared to explain these concepts and their significance in relation to the seminar; be also prepared to pose questions about concepts that you do not (fully) grasp.

14/05 [Public holiday / no meeting]

[Please remember to finish – or (if you have already read it) to review – Henry Green's novel *Back* (which will be discussed on 21/05).]

21/05 **Post-war literature:****IDIOSYNCRATIC MEMORY and the NOVEL**

- Damon Marcel DeCoste, "The Literary Response to the Second World War," *A Companion to the British and the Irish Novel: 1945-2000*, ed. Brian W. Shaffer (Blackwell, 2005) 3-20 [accessible online through UBW.]
 - Henry Green, *Back* (1946).
- ➔ Please select *at least* two passages from the novel that you would like to discuss in class. Be ready to announce and explain your selections.

WED, 27/05, 6:00 p.m., H5: FILM SCREENING (in preparation for seminar meet'g on following day)

- Guy Hamilton (dir.), *The Colditz Story* (1955).

It would be appreciated if all participants in the seminar might be able to participate in the film screening. In case you cannot come on 27/05, please make sure that you have access to the film and are able to watch it on your own. (Speak to me if in doubt about this.)

28/05 **Post-war popular/media culture:**

Standard FIGURES OF MEMORY

- Nicholas J. Cull, "'Great Escapes': 'Englishness' and the Prisoner of War Genre," *Film History* 14.3/4 (2002): 282-295 [accessible online through UBW/JSTOR: [LINK](#)].
 - *The Colditz Story* (1955) [film not openly accessible online; see film screening on 26/05].
- ➔ Please select two scenes from the film that you would like to discuss in class. Be ready to announce and explain your selections.

04/06 [Public holiday / no meeting]

11/06 **Totalitarian VIOLENCE & total IMAGINATION:**

J. G. Ballard

- J. G. Ballard, *Empire of the Sun* (1984).
- ➔ Please select *at least* two passages from the novel that you would like to discuss in class. Be ready to announce and explain your selections.

18/06 [No meeting]

25/06 ***Empire of the Sun* cont'd**

WED, 01/07, 6:00 p.m.; H5: FILM SCREENING (in preparation for seminar meet'g on following day)

- Alan Parker (dir.) and Pink Floyd (music), *Pink Floyd's The Wall* (music film, 1982).

It would be appreciated if all participants in the seminar might be able to participate in the film screening. In case you cannot come on 01/07, please make sure that you have access to the film and are able to watch it on your own. (Speak to me if in doubt about this.)

02/07 Towards 'MEMORY CULTURE':**A new discourse of remembrance**

- Zeno Ackermann, "Paradigmen der Erinnerungskultur", *Gedächtnis-Fiktionen: Mediale Erinnerungsfiguren und literarischer Eigensinn in britischen Romanen zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Winter, 2015) 225-255. [Book readable online through UBW // Scan of chapter provided on WueCampus.]
- *Pink Floyd's The Wall* (music film, 1982) [film not openly accessible online; see film screening on 23/06].

09/07 Conclusion**17/07, 10-12: Final test (room TBA)**

! Please note that the final test takes place in a different time slot and room than the regular seminar meetings. (The 17th of July is the Friday of the first 'examination week'.)

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ORGANIZATION OF THE SEMINAR / SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPATION:

In addition to *continuous active participation and preparation*, the following contributions are required to earn credit points:

- All participants need to write at least two READING RESPONSES (see information below) & are expected to contribute to the DISCUSSION FORUM.
- Students of the teacher training and BA programmes will sit a FINAL TEST (which will combine quick assessment tasks and essay questions). Master's students (if any should participate in the seminar) will conclude with a longer ACADEMIC ESSAY (wissenschaftliche Hausarbeit).

READING RESPONSES are short academic essays (c. 1.5–2,5 pp.) that engage with the material assigned for a specific meeting. They should address both the primary text(s) to be discussed in the meeting and the relevant secondary readings. The following points should be considered when writing a reading response:

- How can the topic and material for the meeting be contextualized?
- How do the topic and material tie in with the seminar discussion so far?
- What questions should be posed in relation to the topic/material?
- What can (probably) be shown or established by posing these questions?

Reading responses should try to concretely tackle selected passages from the primary and/or secondary texts assigned. They are due two days before the respective meeting. Please upload your reading response to WueCampus. I'll provide specific feedback on your writing.

PLEASE NOTE: Reflecting is *the* core competence the humanities build on and aim to develop. Your success at and beyond university will depend on determinedly training this competence. So-called 'Artificial Intelligences' (Large Language Models) may seem to respond to your queries, but they certainly do not reflect. Allowing these tools to produce your texts and to do your thinking for you will dramatically weaken your academic and personal development. It is much better to use opportunities for thinking productively and autonomously, and for getting feedback on your actual writing skills.