

*Introduction to British and Irish 20th
Century Literature.*
A course in 28 sessions



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Introduction to British and Irish 20th Century Literature.

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The course aims to provide second-year L2 undergraduate students majoring/minoring in English with a survey of the literature (prose fiction, poetry, and drama) produced by late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century British and Irish authors. The course starts with a selection of works intended to explore the notions of empire and colonialism: a selection of essays by Joseph Chamberlain and J. A. Hobson, poems by Claude McKay and Louise Bennett, a short story by George Orwell, and Joseph Conrad's short novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899). H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898) functions as an introduction of sorts to a selection of World War I poetry by Rupert Brooke, Edward Thomas, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg, and Wilfred Owen. Modernism in prose fiction and poetry is then examined through the study of James Joyce's short story "The Dead" (1914), Virginia Woolf's essays "Modern Fiction" (1921) and "A Room of One's Own" (1929), and through extracts from Woolf's novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), as well as through an analysis of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and his review of Joyce's *Ulysses*, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" (1923). A study of the literature written during and in the aftermath of World War II ensues through the analysis of a selection of poems by W.H. Auden, Dylan Thomas, Edith Sitwell, and Ted Hughes, of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945), and selected chapters from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), and through Samuel Beckett's play *Endgame* (1957). A screening of *Endgame*, filmed in 2000 and directed by Conor McPherson, is scheduled after the two sessions devoted to the analysis of the text. The literature produced in the second half of the twentieth century is examined first through a selection of poems by Ted Hughes, Elizabeth Jennings, Philip Larkin, Seamus Heaney, and Thom Gunn, published between the late 1950s and the early 1990s, and, in addition, through a short story and a play: Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen" (1963), and Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* (1982). The

course concludes with a session on contemporary poets John Agard, Paul Muldoon, Carol Ann Duffy, and Alice Oswald. All the Readings of the Day are taken from *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. II*, eight edition, edited by Stephen Greenblatt and M. H. Abrams (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006); all page numbers refer, by default, to this edition.

Week 1

Day 1

General Introduction to the course

Discussion of the class structure and syllabus, readings, methodology and class dynamics, assignments and assessment (percentages, essay writing, exam). Emphasis is placed on the importance of actively participating in class, on the relevance of essays, and on the fact that classes discuss the ‘Readings of the day’ following the ‘Questions to be discussed in class’ section.

Day 2

Empire and colonialism

Two political essays by Joseph Chamberlain (1836-1914) and J. A. Hobson (1858-1940), a poem by Claude McKay (1889-1948), a monologue by Louise Bennett (1919-2006), and George Orwell’s short story “Shooting an Elephant” (1936) make up the Readings of the Day, which through a group discussion are connected with postcolonial theories on language and literature. To this end, an overview of the postulates put forward by Edward Said (1935-2003) and Homi Bhabha (1949) is provided (Huggan, Lazarus, McLeod, Quayson, Ramazani). The contents of this session are meant to prepare the grounds for a deeper analysis of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), to be discussed on Days 3 and 4.

READINGS OF THE DAY

Joseph Chamberlain, from *The True Conception of Empire* (1897), pp. 1630-1632.

J. A. Hobson, from *Imperialism: A Study* (1902), pp. 1632-1634.

Claude McKay, "Old England" (1912), p. 2463-2464.

Louise Bennett (aka, Miss Lou), "Jamaica Language" (1993), pp. 2469-2470. A version of this monologue, performed by the author, is available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W58MtDzanqA>

George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant" (1936), pp. 2379-2384.

Questions to be discussed in class

1. Which are the three stages in Britain's imperial history according to Joseph Chamberlain? How does he justify British rule over the colonies? How does he portray the colonies and its native inhabitants?
2. How does Hobson describe the politics of imperialism? Which are some of the figures that he gives in his 1902 study?
3. How does Claude McKay, born to a poor farm-working family in Jamaica, refer to England in his poem? Why is it significant that the poem is written in Jamaican Creole?
4. How does Louise Bennett describe Jamaican Creole? What do you think is the significance of her vindication of the language?
5. George Orwell, who worked as an officer in colonial Burma from 1922 to 1927, reflects on the nature of British colonialism in his short story "Shooting an Elephant". In which ways does he do so? Which are his views about it?
6. The elephant in Orwell's story has often been read symbolically. What do you think it may be a symbol of?

Bibliography

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- Lazarus, Neil, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- López, Alfred J. *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005.
- McLeod, John, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Quayson, Ato. *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Ramazani, Jahan. *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry*. Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Week 2

Day 3

Empire and colonialism: Joseph Conrad

This session discusses Section 1 of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) with a particular focus on, on the one hand, representations of colonial practices (Francis, White) and, on the other, style and narrative techniques (Adams, Graham, Greaney, Lothe).

READINGS OF THE DAY

Joseph Conrad, from *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Section 1 (pp. 1890-1912).

Questions to be discussed in class

1. How does the frame narrative of *Heart of Darkness* work? Which are the settings and the narrators involved? What is the effect of using such a technique?
2. How are flashbacks and flash-forwards used in Marlow's storytelling? How does this affect the story? What is the effect of such management of time?
3. How are images of light / white(ness) and dark(ness) / black(ness) used in the novel from its very opening aboard the ship on the Thames?
4. How are the Manager and the Company men described? And the workings of the Company itself? How are the working native men depicted? What is the overall effect of such descriptions? What do they say about practices of colonialism?
5. Rivers have great pre-eminence in Conrad's novella. How are they described and for which purposes are they used?
6. Who is "Mr Kurtz"? How is he described in Section 1?

Bibliography

- Adams, R. "The Ambiguous Beginning of *Heart of Darkness*", in *Readings on Joseph Conrad*, ed. by Clarice Swisher. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, 1998, pp. 116-121.
- Francis, Andrew, "Postcolonial Conrad", in *The New Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. by J. H. Stape. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 147-159.
- Graham, Kenneth, "Conrad and Modernism", in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. by J. H. Stape. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 203-222.
- Greaney, Michael, "Conrad's Style", in *The New Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. by J. H. Stape. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 102-115.
- Lothe, Jakob, "Conradian Narrative", in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. by J. H. Stape. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 160-178.
- White, Andrea, "Conrad and Imperialism", in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. by J. H. Stape. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 179-202.

Day 4

Empire and colonialism: Joseph Conrad (continued)

This session examines Sections 2 and 3 of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; political readings of the novella as well as matters of style and narrative technique continue to be considered. To spark further debates, students are presented with extracts from Conrad's "An Outpost of Progress" (1897), where he reflects on the six months that he spent in Africa, in Congo in particular, and with other selected extracts from his essay "Geography and Some Explorers" (1924), where he throws some light on episodes of his life that directly relate to his novella.

READINGS OF THE DAY

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Sections 2 and 3 (pp. 1912-1947).

Questions to be discussed in class

1. There are several references throughout the story to the El Dorado expedition. Why do you think that is?

2. On page 1915, Marlow reflects aloud on their situation, and concludes the following: "When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality—the reality, I tell you—fades. The inner truth is hidden—luckily, luckily".

How do you interpret these words? What do you think it is meant by 'the reality'?

3. In which terms are the jungle and, more generally, nature described? How does humankind fit in these descriptions?

4. On page 1926, Marlow affirms that "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz". What does he mean by this? How is Marlow's return to Europe? How does he describe being back?

5. How do you interpret Kurtz's cries "The horror! The horror!"? What do you think he means by this? What is the significance of Marlow's lying about them to Kurtz's fiancée?

6. *Heart of Darkness* has often been described as a tale of intrigue and mystery. How are these built in the narrative? If there is a mystery to be solved, what is it?

Bibliography

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Conrad, Joseph. "An Outpost of Progress", in *Tales of Unrest*, ed. by Allan Simmons and J. H. Stape. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 198-206.

Conrad, Joseph. "Geography and Some Explorers", in *Last Essays*, ed. by H. Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape and Owen Knowles. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 3-22.

Coroneos, Con. *Space, Conrad, and Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

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Simmons, Allan H. "Reading *Heart of Darkness*", in *The New Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. by J. H. Stape. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 15-18.

Watts, Cedric. "*Heart of Darkness*", in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. by J. H. Stape. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 45-62.

Week 3

Day 5

Pre-WWI literature: H.G. Wells

This session opens with an introduction to H.G. Wells (1866-1946) and his work as a pioneer in the science fiction genre. Wells's involvement in politics is furthermore discussed (Partington), as well as selected extracts from his lecture "The Discovery of the Future" (1902). *The War of the Worlds* (1898) is used here as the gateway to, on the one hand, the study of twentieth-century literature and, more specifically, World War I literature (Cornils). Students are encouraged to listen to the radio drama "War of the Worlds", directed and narrated by Orson Welles, as broadcast on 30 October 1938, and available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzC3Fg_rRJM (Running time: 55 minutes).

READINGS OF THE DAY

H.G. Wells, from *The War of the Worlds* (1898), Book One ("The Coming of the Martians"): Chapters I ("The Eve of the War"), II ("The Falling Star"), V ("The Heat-Ray"), IX ("The Fighting Begins") and XII ("What I Saw of the Destruction of Weybridge and Shepperton").

Questions to be discussed in class

1. How are the Martians described in these chapters in terms of their physical appearance? What is it said about their weaponry and war practices? What might that suggest about end-of-the-century fears and anxieties?
2. What is the effect of using a first person narrator? Who is the narrator? When is he telling the events of the invasion of the Earth by the Martians?
3. How does Chapter IX ("The Fighting Begins") describe the fight between earthlings and Martians? Where are the events of the chapter set?

4. What do you think these chapters reveal about past conflicts and previous experiences of war? Do you think they offer an insight into practices of war that would become standard in the future?
5. Do you find any reflections, implicit or explicit, on notions of empire and imperialism and practices of colonisation? How are they phrased?
6. Which kinds of strategies does Wells use to create suspense and a sense of terror?

Bibliography

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Day 6

World War I poetry

The study of the impact of World War I upon a generation of British writers is carried out in this session through the analysis of extracts from Robert Graves's autobiography, *Good-Bye to All That* (1929), and from Siegfried Sassoon's diaries, as well as through extracts from *Regeneration* (1991), the first of Pat Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy*, focusing on the experience of poet-soldiers such as Sassoon and Owen in World War I. An analysis of a selection of poetry written during World War I by Rupert Brooke (1887-1915), Edward Thomas (1878-1917), Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967), Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918), Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) and Robert Graves (1895-1985) then ensues. Finally, dramatized readings of these poems by present-day actors and actresses from the series "Remembering World War I" (Channel 4, available online at <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/remembering-world-war-i>) are screened in class.

READINGS OF THE DAY

Rupert Brooke, "The Soldier" (1914), p. 1955.

Edward Thomas, "Adlestrop" (1915), p. 1956; "Tears" (1915), p. 1957.

Siegfried Sassoon, "They" (1916), pp. 1960-1961; "The Rear-Guard" (1917), p. 1961; "The General" (1917), pp. 1961-1962.

Isaac Rosenberg, "Break of Day in the Trenches" (1916), p. 1967; "Returning, We Hear the Larks" (1917), p. 1968.

Wilfred Owen, "Anthem for Doomed Youth" (1917), pp. 1971-1972; "Dulce et Decorum Est" (1917), p. 1974.

Robert Graves, "Recalling War" (1935), pp. 1988-1989.

Questions to be discussed in class

1. How is war and life in the trenches portrayed in the selected poems? How do these authors refer to it and to their mission as soldiers?
2. Some of these poems consider not only life at war, but also the experience of war at home. In which ways do they reflect on how war is perceived from Britain?
3. Do you find any similarities in terms of imagery in this selection of poems?
4. Rhetorical figures such as alliteration and onomatopoeia are not infrequent in these poems. What purpose do they serve and what are their effects?
5. Do you find any traces of irony in any of these poems? Why is irony employed in them?

Bibliography

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Week 4

Day 7

Modernism in prose fiction: James Joyce

This session revolves around the first half of the short story “The Dead” (1914) by James Joyce (1882-1941), that is, up to p. 2184, right when Gabriel sits down at the dinner table. An overview of James Joyce’s short story collection *Dubliners* and the rest of his production (Leonard, Mahaffey) is followed by an introduction to the political situation of Ireland at the time when the book was published (Deane, Gibson, Gillespie, Howes, Shovlin), which acquires particular relevance in the discussion of the passages of “The Dead” involving Miss Ivors. To this end, the “Timeline of Irish history” put together by John O’Beirne Ranelagh in his *A Short History of Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 392-396) is reviewed and commented on in class to provide students with some historical background. Special attention is moreover paid to style and narrative techniques, as Day 8 offers a more in-depth examination of the principles of Modernism.

READINGS OF THE DAY

James Joyce, from “The Dead”, 2172-2184.

Questions to be discussed in class

1. Who is Gabriel and how is he described? How are his aunts depicted?
2. How is the social interaction that happens at the Christmas party revealing of the dynamics of the time in terms of class and gender? How would you describe Gabriel’s interaction with the female characters?
3. What does the subplot featuring Freddy Malins reveal about Gabriel?
4. Who is Miss Ivors? How is she portrayed? How would you describe her political views and those of Gabriel?
5. Which kind of narrator does the short story have? How are readers given access to Gabriel’s thoughts?

Bibliography

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- Shovlin, Frank. *Journey Westward: Joyce, Dubliners and the Literary Revival*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012.

Day 8

Modernism in prose fiction: James Joyce (continued)

This session revolves around the second half of Joyce's short story "The Dead", which begins on p. 2185, right when the dinner starts. Through a group discussion, the building of the story towards the culminating moment of the epiphany is analyzed; special attention is given to the ending of the story and its symbolism. From the 1987 film adaptation of the short story directed by John Huston, and similarly entitled *The Dead*, two scenes are screened in class:

- the moment when Gretta listens to the song 'The Lass of Aughrim':
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1CP5Lz2iHE>
- the final scene, i.e. the conversation between Gabriel and Gretta:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXHHHdrc-Q8>

A final recapitulation of some of the most salient traits of Joyce's style and, more generally, of Modernism, ensues as a means of a conclusion (Butler, Gibbons, Parsons, Trotter).

READINGS OF THE DAY

James Joyce, from "The Dead", pp. 2185-2199.

Questions to be discussed in class

1. How would you describe Gabriel's annual speech at the dinner table? What does Gabriel talk about? What kind of language does he use to do so?
2. What would you say is the climax of the story? Why? How does the short story build up towards it?
3. What is the role that music has in this short story? In which ways is it present throughout and what kinds of purposes does it serve?
4. Joyce's "The Dead" is often used to illustrate the concept of epiphany. When does the epiphany exactly happen in this short story? What is it revealed and who realizes what?

5. Who are ‘the dead’ in the short story? How is death present in one way or another throughout?
6. What is the symbolism of snow in “The Dead”? What is its significance at the end of the story?

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Week 5

Day 9

Training session for Essay 1

Both Essays 1 and 2 require having read in full the pieces discussed in class as well as another work (which may be an essay, a short story, a poem or a set of poems) that somehow relates to the material covered in class and that fosters critical re-readings and further analysis.

ESSAY TOPICS FOR ESSAY I

Choose one of the following topics to write your first essay:

1. In his short story collection *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), Ray Bradbury (1920-2012) chronicles how humans colonize Mars and thus come into conflict with the native Martians. After reading the selection from *The Martian Chronicles*, discuss 1) similarities and differences in the account of the encounter between earthlings and Martians with respect to H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, and 2) the practices of colonization described.
2. Discuss the portrayal of the figure of the World War I soldier drawing from the poems and other texts discussed in class as well as from "Introduction to the Trenches", by the imagist poet Richard Aldington (1892-1962), who narrates a soldier's first night in No Man's Land in the trenches of Belgium in 1916.
3. After reading the selection from Chinua Achebe's 1977 essay *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness* (pp. 2709-2714), write an essay expressing your dis/agreement with it.

4. Leonard Woolf, husband to Virginia Woolf, authored in 1921 the short story “Pearls and Swine”, set in colonial Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), which has been described as a tale of imperialism. Write an essay on the similarities and differences between Conrad and Woolf in their treatment of colonialism in general and, in particular, through characters such as, respectively, Kurtz and White.
5. Like “The Dead”, James Joyce’s “Araby” (pp. 2168-2172) is also part of his short story collection *Dubliners*, and like “The Dead”, there is also a moment in which a character has an epiphany. Discuss the similarities and differences between the two epiphanies and how the narration is built towards those moments of revelation.
6. After reading the short story “Ivy Day in the Committee Room”, also included in James Joyce’s *Dubliners*, write an essay on the portrayal of political debates about Ireland in the two short stories.

Day 10

Modernism in poetry: T. S. Eliot

The session opens with a group discussion of T.S. Eliot's review "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" (1923), published in the Modernist literary journal *The Dial*, where Eliot (1888-1965) praises James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and acknowledges the relevance of Joyce's work and its techniques to capture modern consciousness. Then, *The Waste Land* (1922) is examined as a Modernist poetic endeavour to depict the disillusionment of post-World War I society, and it is noted how the reasons for which Eliot praises Joyce's *Ulysses* coincide with his own poetic tenets in operation in the poem. Finally, "Imagisme; A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" (1913), by Ezra Pound, who would incidentally define *The Waste Land* as "an emotional unit", is read against Eliot's work and connected with it to advance the discussion of the innovative formal techniques used in the poem to capture the crisis following the Great War; emphasis is placed on the poem's structure, symbolism, and use of mythological references (Blistein, Booth, Davidson, Litz, Rabaté, Rainey, Sharratt).

READINGS OF THE DAY

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922), pp. 2295-2308.

T. S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" (1923).

* British actor Sir Alec Guinness recorded a reading of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* available online: <https://soundcloud.com/ludifex/sets/alec-guinness-the-waste-land> (Running time: 24 mins.); T. S. Eliot himself also recorded a reading of his poem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqvhMeZ2PIY> (Running time: 26 mins.)

Questions to be discussed in class

1. For which reasons does T.S. Eliot praise Joyce's *Ulysses*? What does Eliot's review argue Joyce does in the novel that previous authors had not done? Why does Eliot think that Joyce's way of writing is more suitable to capture the experiences of his time?
2. In which ways and for which purposes are mythological references as well as historical ones used throughout *The Waste Land*?

3. What does each of the five sections of the poem discuss? How are the titles of each of the sections meaningful? What does such an arrangement suggest?
4. Which are some of the most common rhetorical figures in the poem? For which purposes are they used? What is their effect?
5. What would you say are some of the major symbols in the poem? What do you think they mean?
6. How does *The Waste Land* portray the aftermath of World War I?

Bibliography

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Week 6

Day 11

Modernism in prose fiction: Virginia Woolf

This session opens with a group discussion of the main features that Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) identifies in her essay “Modern Fiction” (1921) in the literature produced by herself and her Georgian contemporaries as opposed to that of their Edwardian predecessors, with a focus on the notion and treatment of ‘character’ (Froula, a; Goldman). Through the study of her essay, the principles of Modernism are reviewed. Selected extracts from her essay “Poetry, Fiction and the Future” (1927) are additionally presented to students in class to further the discussion and continue illustrating her ideas on modern fiction (Lee, Whitworth). Then, selected episodes from Woolf’s novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) are studied; these concern the characters of Septimus Warren Smith, a World War I veteran, and his Italian wife, Lucrezia (Rezia) Smith. The aim of this analysis is to identify in practice the principles of Woolf’s fiction as explained in her essays; particular attention is paid to the characterization of Septimus Warren Smith and the representation in the novel of shell shock, later on renamed Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (Froula, b).

READINGS OF THE DAY

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), “Modern Fiction” (1921), pp. 2087-2092.

Virginia Woolf, from *Mrs Dalloway* (1925).

Questions to be discussed in class

1. How does Virginia Woolf assess the fiction produced by authors of the previous generation? In which terms does she refer particularly to H.G. Wells and to Conrad? Why?
2. What is the role of impressions in the way Woolf constructs her narrative? What effect does that have upon her way of writing?

3. In which terms does Woolf talk about the work of James Joyce? How does she affirm that Joyce goes about writing his novels?
4. How are flashbacks important in the portrayal of the character of Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs Dalloway*? What function do they serve?
5. How are the inner thoughts of both Septimus and his wife Lucrezia narrated? Which kinds of techniques does Woolf use to allow readers into their consciousness?
6. How were Septimus's mental issues understood at the time by physicians? What is he advised to do to improve his condition? Why do you think a character such as Septimus was included in the novel?

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Day 12

Modernism in prose fiction: Virginia Woolf (continued)

This session revolves around a group discussion of Chapters I to IV of Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" (1929), which particularly consider the issues of women and privacy, economic independence, and creative genius. Writing practices of women writers and the literary output of some of the most famous female writers up to the moment of the publication of Woolf's essay are reviewed, and the perception on the part of male authors of women and the portrayal of women in their work briefly discussed (DeSalvo, Froula). Through Woolf's essay, the situation of women in the first decades of twentieth-century Britain is examined (Black, Marcus), and an introduction to the British suffrage and early feminist movements is provided (Smith, Wingerden).

READINGS OF THE DAY

Virginia Woolf, "A Room of One's Own" (1929), Chapters I-IV, pp. 2092-2133.

Questions to be discussed in class

1. How does Virginia Woolf use the analysis of poetry in Chapter I to put forward her argument on women and writing? What does she conclude from her analyses?
2. What does Woolf say about male authors writing about women in Chapter II of her essay? What are the effects that, according to Woolf, that has? Which kinds of quotations from male authors does she use to back up her argument?
3. How does Woolf use personal stories and anecdotes to build her case? Consider, for instance, the story Woolf tells about her aunt Mary Beton and her reflections on the life in her 'little street' (Chapter II). What are stories such as those meant to illustrate?
4. What does Woolf conclude from her speculation in Chapter III about what would have happened to a woman with Shakespeare's genius in Shakespeare's days?
5. How does Woolf assess the works of Aphra Behn, Jane Austen, George Eliot and the Brontë sisters in Chapter V?

6. Why is Woolf's essay entitled "A Room of One's Own"? What is the correlation established between economic independence and literary production?

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Week 7

Day 13

World War II poetry

A selection of poems by poets who did not fight in World War II but who experienced war by witnessing the attacks on English soil, namely, W. H. Auden (1907-1973), Dylan Thomas (1914-1953), and Edith Sitwell (1887-1964), are here studied. In addition, a selection of poems by Ted Hughes (1930-1998) is considered, as Hughes was marked by the experience of living the aftermath of World War II and brought up with the anxieties of war survivors, which also affected his life and his poetry (Meyers, Moulin, Pearsall). The session moreover examines how the poetry produced during the Great War shaped poetic accounts of World War II (Bellamy), how World War II influenced the prose fiction of a variety of authors, from Roald Dahl (1916-1990) to Muriel Spark (1918-2006) (Ellis, Reeves), and how it is typically considered to mark the beginning of the end of Modernism in literature in Britain (MacKay). An introduction to the main tenets of Trauma Studies and the beginnings of Postmodernism is also provided (Crosthwaite).

READINGS OF THE DAY

W. H. Auden (1907-1973), "Spain" (1937), pp. 2424-2427, "September 1, 1939" (1939), pp. 2432-2434, "Poetry as Memorable Speech" (1935), pp. 2438-2441.

Dylan Thomas (1914-1953), "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London" (1945), "Ceremony after a Fire Raid".

Edith Sitwell (1887-1964), "Still Falls the Rain" (1942), pp. 2453.

Ted Hughes (1930-1998), "The Casualty" (1957), "Out" (1967), pp. 2597-2598.

Lois Clark, "Picture from the Blitz" (1982).

* Readings of the following poems are available online:

- W. H. Auden, "September 1, 1939", read by Dylan Thomas:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ED4sN16x1ls>

- Dylan Thomas, "Ceremony after a Fire Raid", read by Dylan Thomas:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETAhsXKTOu4>

- Edith Sitwell, "Still Falls the Rain", read by Sir Arthur John Gielgud:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hpgXNp3iiE>

Questions to be discussed in class

1. Do you find any similarities and differences, both in terms of form and content, between these poems and those produced by World War I poets?

2. How does W. H. Auden approach the Spanish Civil War in his poem "Spain", and how does he discuss in "September 1, 1939" the outbreak of World War II? Do you find any similarities and differences between the two poems?

3. How are the raids on London described by Dylan Thomas and Edith Sitwell? What is the effect of repeating the line "Still falls the Rain" in Sitwell's poem? What does it mean?

4. Very little is known about Lois Clark, except that she drove a stretcher-party car in Brixton during the Blitz and saw closely the effects of the bombings. Her poem "Picture from the Blitz", published in Catherine Reilly's anthology *Chaos of the Night: Women's Poetry and Verse of the Second World War*, was written in the early 80s, and in it Clark recalls one such bombings. In which terms does she do so? What does she recall from that night and how does she give her memories poetic form?

5. The case of Ted Hughes is that of a poet whose life was marked by the experience of war without himself having been a combatant or having personally experienced war attacks. As Joanny Moulin (*Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons*, 2005, p. 2) explains:

"Both World Wars deeply affected Hughes's personality development. As a child Hughes heard endless stories of the dead and the survivors of World War I at family gatherings and at Sunday night dinners, for his father was one of only seventeen survivors of an entire regiment that went through its numbers three times at Gallipoli. Hughes was nine when World War II began, and his adolescence was molded in the food rationing, the stresses of the Blitz, and the daily news accounts of the fighting. German fighters flew sorties regularly over much of England, looking mostly for aircraft hangars and Rolls Royce engine factories, but also bombing many cities in the shires. Parachuted pilots already crisped by explosions and fires in their planes were not uncommon."

Which kind of episode does Hughes describe in “The Casualty”? Who is the casualty? Which are the rhetorical figures that he most commonly employs in the poem and to what effect?

6. Hughes’s poem “Out” is divided into three sections. What is each of those sections about? In which ways and why do they formally differ from each other?

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Day 14

Post WWII prose fiction: George Orwell

This session revolves around George Orwell's novella *Animal Farm* (1945). The discussion considers the work as a political fable with a moral against the dangers of power and totalitarian forms of government (Dickstein, Dwan, Kirschner). Orwell's political thought is thus introduced (Bryfonski, Conquest, Rodden), and special emphasis is placed on matters of language and power, and the uses of propaganda (Senn). Orwell's experience working for the BBC between 1941 and 1943 is here considered. Students are presented with selected extracts from his essay "Looking Back on the Spanish War" (1943), where Orwell gives an account of his memories as a combatant on the side of the Republican army in the Spanish Civil War, provides his interpretation of the conflict years after it ended, and explains his political stance towards it.

READINGS OF THE DAY

George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (1945). For an introduction to George Orwell's life and thought, listen to the BBC Radio 4 "Great Lives" (Series 28) show on George Orwell: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01mqpgh> (Running time: 30 mins.)

Questions to be discussed in class

1. Examine Old Major's speech to the animals in Chapter 1. How does he persuade his listeners? In which ways and with which arguments does he do so?
2. How does Napoleon's rise to power happen? What / who is accountable for his becoming a leader?
3. What is the role of literacy in *Animal Farm*? How does propaganda work in the novella?
4. What are the Seven Commandments? How do they change over the course of the story from Old Major's death to Napoleon's banquet with the farmers?

5. What is *Animal Farm* a satire of? How does humour work in the novella? For which purposes is it used?

6. Why do you think Orwell chose to tell the story as a political fable? What difference can it make reading a story such as this one with animals as characters and a farm as its setting?

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Week 8

Day 15

WWII prose fiction: George Orwell (continued)

In this session, Chapters 1, 3, 4 and 5 of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) are discussed. The characteristics of the dystopian world described in the novel are examined (Claeys), and special emphasis placed on matters of literacy, propaganda, the rewriting of history, the role of the press, and the connection between power and language (Carr, Crick, Fowler). The relevance of Newspeak as a political weapon, the compilation of a Newspeak Dictionary, the functions of the Ministry of Truth, and the notion of doublethink are particularly considered. Orwell's political ideas are furthermore analysed in connection with those he put forward in three of his essays: "Politics and the English Language" (pp. 2384-2393) (Chapman), "Propaganda and Demotic Speech" (1944), and "Why I Write" (1946), where, in addition to "sheer egoism" and "aesthetic enthusiasm", Orwell acknowledges a "historical impulse" as well as a "political purpose" in his drive to write (Harris, Marks, Tibbetts). Since these three essays are not compulsory readings, selected fragments from them are presented to students in class to foster debate.

READINGS OF THE DAY

George Orwell, from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Chapters 1, 3, 4 and 5.

Questions to be discussed in class

1. What is the Ingsoc? And the Ministry of Truth? Which are its functions?
2. What is 'doublethink'? What does it entail? Why is it encouraged?
3. What is Newspeak? Could it be considered a political weapon in the hands of the Party? Why?
4. What is the importance of Winston writing a diary? Why could this be considered a subversive act?

5. What are the 'Two Minutes Hate'? Why does the Party institutionalize (and encourage) public expressions of rage during them?
6. How is the past presented and described in the novel? In which ways and for which purposes is it rewritten? How is that done? What does that say about the way history is understood?

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Day 16

Feedback and discussion: Essay 1

Week 9

Day 17

Training session for Essay 2

Both Essays 1 and 2 require having read in full the pieces discussed in class as well as another work (which may be an essay, a short story, a poem or a set of poems) that somehow relates to the material covered in class and that fosters critical re-readings and further analysis.

ESSAY TOPICS FOR ESSAY 2

Choose one of the following topics to write your second essay:

1. Read T. S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) (pp. 2319-2325), and discuss *The Waste Land* and "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" in the light of it.
2. Read Virginia Woolf's short story "The Mark on the Wall" (1917) (pp. 2082-2087) and discuss it in connection with her essay "Modern Fiction". How does the short story comply with the features of Modernism?
3. Could "A Room of One's Own" be considered a Modernist essay? Discuss its structure and how it integrates stories and elements of fiction to construct its argument.
4. Compare W.H. Auden's poem "Spain" and George Orwell's essay "Looking Back on the Spanish War". How do the two authors approach the Spanish conflict in their texts?

5. In “Politics and the English Language”, George Orwell affirms that “if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought”. Discuss how this idea is illustrated in *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

6. Compare and contrast the views on writing and the motivations to write as put forward by W. H. Auden’s “Poetry as Memorable Speech”, Virginia Woolf’s “Modern Fiction” and “A Room of One’s Own”, and George Orwell’s “Politics and the English Language” and “Why I Write”.

Day 18

Post WWII drama; the Theatre of the Absurd: Samuel Beckett

This is the first of the two sessions on the one-act play *Endgame* (1957) by Samuel Beckett (1906-1989). After an introduction to the characteristics of Samuel Beckett's oeuvre, as a playwright as well as a prose fiction writer, and of the Theatre of the Absurd, contextualized in post-WWII Europe (Esslin, Webb, Weller, Worton), the first half of the play (in terms of page-count) is analysed. Students are to enumerate what they identify as defining features of the play with regard to the uses of dialogue and monologue (and dialectical monologue), its setting and atmosphere, and the nature of the characters involved (Riquelme, Shields).

READINGS OF THE DAY

Samuel Beckett, from *Endgame* (1957), pp. 2394-2407.

As an introduction to Samuel Beckett's life and work, listen to the BBC Radio 4 "Great Lives" (Series 23) on Samuel Beckett: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b00wqbjq> (Running time: 30 mins.)

Questions to be discussed in class

1. Discuss the setting of the play. How are stage directions used to create its particular atmosphere?
2. The play opens with a long dialogue between Clov and Hamm. Who are these two characters? How would you describe them? Which kind of relationship do they have?
3. When Nell appears onstage, there is a change in the dynamics of the conversation, and Nell and Nagg then sustain a long dialogue. How is it different from the one between Clov and Hamm at the beginning of the play?
4. What do you think is suggested by Nagg and Nell being in dustbins throughout the play?
5. Both Nagg and Hamm give a long speech each. What do they talk about then and in which terms do they do so? What is the effect of these long speeches?

6. How are stage directions, which Beckett was known to be scrupulous about, used for characterisation purposes? In which ways do they provide information to take aboard when performing the text?

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Week 10

Day 19

Post WWII drama; the Theatre of the Absurd: Samuel Beckett (continued)

This second session on Beckett's play *Endgame* focuses on the second half of the play (in terms of page-count), and particularly on power playing, power relations, and the notion of game. In this regard the master-servant relationship between Hamm and Clov is examined in more detail. Special emphasis is placed on the soliloquies, as well as on the construction of dialogue and its musicality (Frost), and on the humorous and comic elements of the play (Cascetta, Topsfield). Extracts from Theodor Adorno's essay "Trying to Understand *Endgame*" (1958) are presented to students in class to encourage further debate and to connect Beckett's theatrical endeavours with philosophical postulates, particularly those of French Existentialism (Adorno, Morin, Murphy).

READINGS OF THE DAY

Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (1957), pp. 2408-2420.

Questions to be discussed in class

1. Why do you think *Endgame* is entitled precisely like that? Which elements of game playing pervade the play? What does the idea of an 'end-' suggest and in which ways is it present throughout the play?
2. How do power relations operate in the play? Consider particularly the case of Clov and Hamm.
3. Hamm is given in this second half three long speeches, including the final soliloquy. Which are the contents of each of them? How do you interpret his concluding soliloquy?
4. There are numerous allusions to God and the Bible in *Endgame*. How do you interpret these? Which purposes do you think they serve?

5. Identify and discuss the comic and humorous moments in the play. How is that humour constructed?

6. How would you describe the dialogue in this play? Do you find there is any special significance in the musicality of the words? What role does sound have in the construction of dialogue?

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Day 20

Screening of the play *Endgame*, by Samuel Beckett

The 2000 film adaptation of *Endgame*, as directed by the Irish playwright, screenwriter and director Conor McPherson, is screened in class (Running time: 1h. 21mins.). The screening is followed by a group discussion of some of the key topics previously examined in class about the text of the play, which is compared and contrasted with its performance; a discussion of the changing attitudes on the part of students after seeing the play performed concludes the session.

Screening of the production...

Endgame, directed by Conor McPherson (2000). Running time: 1h. 21mins.

Cast:

Michael Gambon	...	Hamm
David Thewlis	...	Clov
Jean Anderson	...	Nell
Charles Simon	...	Nagg

To be discussed after the screening

1. How are the humorous and comic elements of the text performed? Did you find them funnier when read or onstage? Why?
2. How are the soliloquies rendered in the adaptation? Has there been anything unexpected in their performance?
3. How does dialogue between the different characters contribute to creating a specific pace? How does this pace change depending on who participates in the conversation?
4. Have power relations become more or less apparent in the performance as compared to when you read the text? Why do you think that is?
5. How does the physicality of the performance implement the indications provided in the stage directions? Has this surprised you in any way?
6. Has your perception of the musicality of the dialogue changed after seeing the play performed?

Week 11

Day 21

Post 1950s poetry

This session focuses on the poetic production of a selection of authors who were part of the so-called “The Movement”, and who reclaimed traditional and conventional verse over Modernist forms—namely, Philip Larkin (1922-1985), Elizabeth Jennings (1926-2001), Ted Hughes (1930-1998) and Thom Gunn (1929-2004). A selection of their poetry spanning from the 1950s to the 1990s is explored in connection with Seamus Heaney’s essay “Englands of the Mind” (1976). In this publication Heaney (1939-2013) elaborates on his notion of post-1945 poetry in English and takes the poetry of Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill, and Philip Larkin as examples (Bradley, Falci, Ingelbien, Larrissy, Rosenthal, Sheppard). Finally, two poems by Heaney are also included as part of the Readings of the Day to illustrate his own poetic work, which he began in the 1960s.

READINGS OF THE DAY

Ted Hughes, “Wind” (1957), pp. 2594-2595; “Relic” (1957), p. 2595; “Pike” (1960), pp. 2595-2596.

Elizabeth Jennings, “The Painter” (1957), “A Summing-Up” (1969).

Philip Larkin, “High Windows” (1967), p. 2570; “Sad Steps” (1974), p. 2571; “This Be the Verse” (1974), pp. 2572-2573; “Aubade” (1977), pp. 2573-2574.

Seamus Heaney, “Digging” (1966), pp. 2824-2825; “Casualty” (1976), pp. 2828-2830; selection from “Englands of the Mind” (1976).

Thom Gunn, “Black Jackets” (1961), p. 2583; “Still Life” (1992), p. 2585; “The Missing” (1992), pp. 2585-2586.

A recording of Ted Hughes reading his poem “Pike” is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4tZE98hRsU>

A recording of Philip Larkin reading his poem “Aubade” is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDr_SRhJs80

A reading and an explanation by Seamus Heaney of his poem “Digging” is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvneazagsRI>

Questions to be discussed in class

1. How are natural elements and animals used by Ted Hughes in his poems? For which purposes are they used? In which ways are they present in metaphors?
2. How does Philip Larkin reflect about the past and the present in his poetry? How is religion a presence in it? How does humour work in “This Be the Verse”?
3. How does Seamus Heaney’s “Digging” weave recollections of his family with observations on his own poetry writing? What is the effect of the repetition of the word “digging” in several moments of the poem?
4. In which terms does Seamus Heaney describe the poetry of Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes in his essay “Englands of the Mind”? How do they differ according to Heaney? What do they have in common?
5. How does Elizabeth Jennings’s “The Painter” and “Still Life” use the rhetorical figure of ekphrasis? Why is it fitting for Jennings to use the sonnet form in “A Summing-Up”?
6. How does Thom Gunn reflect on the death of his friends of AIDS in “Still Life” and “The Missing”?

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Day 22

Post 1950s prose fiction: Doris Lessing

The short story “To Room Nineteen” (1963) by Doris Lessing (1919-2013) is examined particularly in regard to its portrayal of marriage, motherhood, women in the sphere of the domestic, and the eventual descent of the protagonist into madness. The short story is studied in connection with Virginia Woolf’s essay “A Room of One’s Own”, as well as with Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (Jansen). “To Room Nineteen”, and more generally the short story collection to which it pertains, *A Man and Two Women* (1963), as well as Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook* (1962), are explained in connection with the vindications and postulates of second-wave feminism in Britain (Coelsch-Foisner, Franks, Miller). Selected extracts from the 1971 Preface to *The Golden Notebook*, as well as from a 1966 interview with Lessing (Howe, Kaplan), are analysed in class to offer further insight into Lessing’s political and literary ideas.

READINGS OF THE DAY

Doris Lessing, “To Room Nineteen” (1963), pp. 2544-2565.

For an introduction to Doris Lessing, listen to the BBC Radio 4 “Woman’s Hour” show, where Lessing is interviewed after winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2007 (Running time: 43 mins.): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b00d3rvn>

Questions to be discussed in class

1. Consider the opening sentence of the short story and its meaning: “This is a story, I suppose, about a failure in intelligence: the Rawling’s marriage was grounded in intelligence”. How does it provide clues as to the interpretation of the short story?
2. What are the views about marriage and monogamy that “To Room Nineteen” seems to put forward? How is the experience of marriage different for Matthew and for Susan?
3. How is motherhood portrayed in the short story? How do Susan and Matthew feel about her children?

4. What is the meaning of the title of the short story? What is the significance for Susan of room nineteen?
5. How are solitude and freedom explored in the short story? In which ways are they connected?
6. In which ways does “To Room Nineteen” echo Virginia Woolf’s “A Room of One’s Own” and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper”?

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Week 12

Day 23

1980s drama: Caryl Churchill

After an overview of British drama of the 1970s-1980s, the play *Top Girls* (1982), by Caryl Churchill (1938), is contextualized within the political and economic current of Thatcherism in Britain (Childs, Howard). Through a group discussion, the first two acts of *Top Girls* are examined with an emphasis on the play's construction of dialogue and its portrayal of women's roles both in the workplace and within the family. In this regard, the play is analysed in connection with Lessing's concerns, previously studied, and generally with the postulates of second-wave feminism (Innes, Reinelt a,b,c).

READINGS OF THE DAY

Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls* (1982), Acts I and II.

For an introduction to the plays of Caryl Churchill, please listen to the BBC Radio 4 "Woman's Hour" show on Caryl Churchill on occasion of her 80th birthday (Starting min. 17:48; Running time: 20 mins.): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000178s>

Questions to be discussed in class

1. With which famous women in history does Marlene have a celebration dinner in Act I? Why do you think Churchill chose such an array of women? What point is this dreamlike meeting trying to make?
2. The character of Marlene combines a woman who no longer exists (the old Marlene) and the new one who has been promoted to Managing Director. In which terms does Marlene talk about her own past?
3. How is Marlene's work environment presented in Act II? What does the reader learn from the job interview that she conducts?
4. Who are Angie, Kit and Joyce? What is their relationship to Marlene?

5. Interspersed in the last scene, there are two other job interviews conducted by Win and Nell. What is the kind of tone that prevails in them? How are candidates treated? Why are these interviews interspersed?
6. Who is Mrs Kidd? Why do you think this character is introduced in the story? How can her request to Marlene be read?

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Day 24

1980s drama: Caryl Churchill (continued)

The second session on Churchill's *Top Girls* focuses on Act III and on the politics that underlie the play and that forcefully emerge in Marlene and Joyce's argument (Patterson, Peacock). The language of some of the negative reviews that the play received in the 1980s (see question 5) is also explored. A selection of questions from a Q&A of a 1991 BBC and Open University co-production of Churchill's play is screened. In "Interviews on *Top Girls*" Churchill explains the process of writing her play and the issues she decided to tackle in it, as well as relevant matters to consider in its performance. Her interviews in the documentary are complemented with selected fragments from printed interviews to Churchill in the 1980s (Betsko and Koenig).

READINGS OF THE DAY

Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls* (1982), Act III.

Listen to the pre-show talk, "Directing *Top Girls*: Then and Now", introduced by author Kate Mosse, in which director Max Stafford-Clark discusses his revival of Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* for the 2011 Chichester Festival Theatre (Running time: 26 mins.): <http://www.theatrevoice.com/audio/director-max-stafford-clark-revisits-caryl-churchill%e2%80%99s-top-girls/>

Questions to be discussed in class

1. In Act III Marlene and Joyce have an argument featuring ideas on individualism and meritocracy. What is the stance of each of them regarding success? How would you describe their views about life in general?
2. Would you say this conversation is a moment of catharsis? Would describe the ending as satisfactory or as providing a resolution that appeases tensions? Does it provide some sort of reconciliation between Marlene and Joyce?
3. How and why is chronological disruption used by Churchill throughout the play?
4. How is the figure of Margaret Thatcher present throughout the play? What kind of political statement does the play make regarding Thatcherism?

5. On 8th August 1982, the critic Dick Vosburgh wrote for *Punch* a review of the play in the form of a dialogue between himself and a psychiatrist. Analyse the review and discuss the kind of criticism Churchill had to face for her play:

Psychiatrist: And what exactly is troubling you, Mr Vosburgh?

Vosburgh: Well Doc, Sheridan Morley is on holiday and I'm standing in for him at *Punch*, and last night I...*think* I went to the Royal Court and saw a play by Caryl Churchill called *Top Girls*.

Psychiatrist: What do you mean you *think*? Why aren't you sure you saw this play?

Vosburgh: Well, because it...it seems it opened in a restaurant where Marlene, a pushy modern executive, was welcoming her dinner guests: Isabella Bird (1831-1904), who became a famous world traveller at the age of 40, Lady Nijo, a thirteenth century blonde Japanese courtesan who later became a Buddhist nun, Dull Gret, the subject of the Brueghel painting, Patient Griselda, from the *Canterbury Tales*, and Joan, who posed as a man and was Pope from 1854 to 1856.

Psychiatrist: I see.

Vosburgh: It seems there was a long, very funny scene in which they all talked about their lives, only I missed a lot of it. You see there was a lot of overlapping dialogue because the director, Max Stafford-Clark, would obviously have given his hyphen to have directed *Citizen Kane*. And there was a scene between two kids—teenage girl and a younger one, only they're both played by grown-ups...

Psychiatrist: You say this was a play? It sounds more like a revue.

Vosburgh: I know. [...] Then we're suddenly into what looks like a slice of a fascinating play about the pushy modern executive and her sister and the teenager we met earlier...

Psychiatrist: Mr Vosburgh, will you please take this sedative. You are not a well man—there couldn't *possibly* be such a play as you describe!

6. Discuss Churchill's play in connection with Woolf's "A Room of One's Own". How has the debate about women in the workforce changed since the early twentieth century? Is there anything that remains the same? How are Woolf's and Churchill's concerns similar to and different from each other?

Bibliography

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Week 13

Day 25

Screening of the play *Top Girls*, by Caryl Churchill

Screening of 1991 BBC TV staging of Caryl Churchill's play, directed by Max Stafford-Clark. The screening is followed by a group discussion of some of the key topics previously examined in class about the text of the play, which is compared and contrasted with its performance; a discussion of the changing attitudes on the part of students after seeing the play performed concludes the session.

Screening of the production...

Top Girls, directed by Max Stafford-Clark (1991). Running time: 112 mins.

Contributors

Directed By: Max Stafford-Clark

Producer: Simon Curtis

Marlene: Lesley Manville

Isabella Bird/Joyce/Mrs Kidd: Deborah Findlay

LadyNijo/Win: Sarah Lam

Dull Gret/Angie: Lesley Sharp

Popejoan/Louise: Cecily Hobbs

Patient Griselda/Nell/Jeanine: Anna Patrick

Waitress/Kit/Shona: Beth Goddard

BBC description: <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/68c4e34c44f34122954e7c3b888be5b0>

“Widely regarded as one of the best new plays of the 80s, Caryl Churchill's award-winning *Top Girls* was first seen at London's Royal Court Theatre in 1982 directed by Max Stafford-Clark. This first TV production (in association with the Royal Court) is also directed by Stafford-Clark and features two of the original all-female cast. Seven actresses take 16 roles in this uncompromising assessment of high-profile and low-profile women, part fantasy, part hard-nosed reality. Marlene celebrates her new position as managing director of the Top Girls Appointment Agency by giving a dinner party for five oddly assorted women from centuries past. But Marlene's own past will throw a question mark over her Top Girls success. The author describes her play as "a celebration of the extraordinary achievements of women".”

Day 26

Contemporary poets

This session explores a selection of poems by John Agard (1949), Paul Muldoon (1951), Carol Ann Duffy (1955), and Alice Oswald (1966) in which matters of identity, language, history, personal relations and concerns about the environment come to the fore. These four poets are taken as representatives of contemporary poetry in Britain and of its diversity of voices and concerns. Selections from a series of interviews with these authors, either printed or recorded, are used in class to illustrate their poetic tenets and their overall poetic production, which in some cases goes back to the 1980s.

READINGS OF THE DAY

John Agard, “Listen Mr Oxford Don” (1985), pp. 2542-2543; “Checking Out Me History” (2007). A recording of “Listen Mr Oxford Don” performed by Agard is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ywy-Tthdg7w>

Paul Muldoon, “Gathering Mushrooms” (1983), pp. 2870-2871; “The Grand Conversation” (2002), pp. 2872-2873.

Carol Ann Duffy, “Medusa” (1999), pp. 2875-2876; “Mrs Lazarus” (1999), pp. 2876-2877.

Alice Oswald, “Dunt: A Poem for a Dried up River” (2007); “A Short Story of Falling” (2016); “Rain” (2016). A recording of Oswald’s “Rain” read by the author is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71Jc2LAZOIE>; a reading of her “A Short Story of Falling” is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4rKwW5tgXk> (go to min. 2)

Questions to be discussed in class

1. How does John Agard, born and raised in British Guiana, blend poetic and political rebellion in “Listen Mr Oxford Don”? What does he mean by “my offence”, in the last line of the poem?
2. Paul Muldoon’s father was a farmer and a mushroom grower in Northern Ireland. How are family memories interwoven with scenes of the present in “Gathering Mushrooms”? Who is the ‘you’ of the poem? Why is the final stanza in italics?

3. Who is having “The Grand Conversation”? What kind of information do *She* and *He* provide about themselves and their backgrounds? What do the lines “we may yet construct our future / as we’ve reconstructed our past” mean? How does Agard reconstruct his past in “Checking Out Me History”?
4. How and to what ends does Carol Ann Duffy use mythological and biblical references in, respectively, “Medusa” and “Mrs Lazarus”? What is the effect of both poems using the first person singular pronoun throughout?
5. How is water used as a symbol in Alice Oswald’s “Dunt: A Poem for a Dried up River”, “A Short Story of Falling” and “Rain”? How does it work differently in each of the poems?
6. How do repetitions (of words, phrases, and lines) construct “Dunt: A Poem for a Dried up River”? What does the effect of the repeated “try again” and its eventual replacement with “go on” suggest?

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Muldoon, Paul: BBC Radio 3 “The John Tusa Interviews”, 1 February 2004:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00ncyhh>

Oswald, Alice: BBC Radio “Bookclub”: *Falling Awake* (2016), 3 February 2019:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m00029gc>

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Week 14

Day 27

Feedback and discussion: Essay 2

Day 28

Final revision and mock exam

MOCK EXAM QUESTIONS

1. Long Wharf Theatre's Director of Education, Madelyn Ardito, defines in the following manner the Theatre of the Absurd:

“Absurd plays rebel against traditional theatre. The plot in these plays are either non-existent or of little significance. The plays don't discuss an idea or argument but rather they simply-starkly present the argument. The big questions of the play are left to the spectator or audience to decide. The spectator uses their own experiences of life and ideologies to make sense of the world. The plays of Theatre of the Absurd present non-linear plot structures that do not necessarily move in a straight line. Logic is replaced with the irrational such as repetition of dialogue, nonsense, a minimalist setting, characters that have difficulty communicating, characters that are more two dimensional than three. In general, absurd plays do not tell a story but rather present a picture.”

Considering her definition, now argue why Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* can be in fact placed within this theatrical current. Would you agree that the characters in *Endgame* are “more two dimensional than three”?

2. Identify (title of work, name of author) the following extract and discuss it in connection with the major themes this particular piece explores. How would you describe the relationship between the two speakers? How do politics and power

relations shape the tensions underlying this exchange? When does this moment happen within the play? Why do you think it is placed there?

Marlene: I don't mean anything personal. I don't believe in class. Anyone can do anything if they've got what it takes.

Joyce: And if they haven't?

Marlene: If they're stupid or lazy or frightened, I'm not going to help them get a job, why should I?

Joyce: What about Angie?

Marlene: What about Angie?

Joyce: She's stupid, lazy and frightened, so what about her?

Marlene: You run her down too much. She'll be all right.

Joyce: I don't expect so, no. I expect her children will say what a wasted life she had. If she has children. Because nothing's changed and it won't with them in.

Marlene: Them, them. Us and them?

Joyce: And you're one of them.

Marlene: And you're us, wonderful us, and Angie's us and Mum and Dad's us.

Joyce: Yes, that's right, and you're them.

Marlene: Come on, Joyce, what a night. You've got what it takes.

Joyce: I know I have.

Marlene: I didn't really mean all that.

Joyce: I did.

3. Identify (title of work, name of author) the following poems and discuss them in connection with each other. What are the main themes they explore? On which rhetorical and poetical strategies do they draw to do so?

a)

Entrance and exit wounds are silvered clean,
The track aches only when the rain reminds.
The one-legged man forgets his leg of wood,
The one-armed man his jointed wooden arm.
The blinded man sees with his ears and hands
As much or more than once with both his eyes.
Their war was fought these 20 years ago
And now assumes the nature-look of time,
As when the morning traveller turns and views
His wild night-stumbling carved into a hill.
What, then, was war? No mere discord of flags
But an infection of the common sky
That sagged ominously upon the earth
Even when the season was the airiest May.
Down pressed the sky, and we, oppressed, thrust out
Boastful tongue, clenched fist and valiant yard.
Natural infirmities were out of mode,

For Death was young again; patron alone
Of healthy dying, premature fate-spasm.

[from Robert Graves, "Recalling War" (1935)]

b)

After all these years
I can still close my eyes and see
her sitting there,
in her big armchair,
grotesque under an open sky,
framed by the jagged lines of her broken house.

Sitting there,
a plump homely person,
steel needles still in her work-rough hands;
grey with dust, stiff with shock,
but breathing,
no blood or distorted limbs;
breathing but stiff with shock,
knitting unravelling on her apron'd knee.

They have taken the stretchers off my car
and I am running
under the pattering flack
over a mangled garden;
treading on something soft
and fighting the rising nausea –
only a far-flung cushion, bleeding feathers.

They lift her gently
out of her great armchair,
tenderly,
under the open sky,
a shock-frozen woman trailing khaki wool.

[Lois Clark, "Picture from the Blitz" (1982)]

Day-by-day syllabus

Introduction to British and Irish 20th-century literature. A course in 28 sessions

WEEK 1	Day 1	General introduction to the course: Class structure, readings, assignments, assessment
	Day 2	Empire and colonialism Readings of the day: Joseph Chamberlain, from <i>The True Conception of Empire</i> (1897); J. A. Hobson, from <i>Imperialism: A Study</i> (1902); Claude McKay, “Old England” (1912); Louise Bennett, “Jamaica Language” (1979-81), and George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant” (1936).
WEEK 2	Day 3	Empire and colonialism: Joseph Conrad Readings of the day: Joseph Conrad, <i>Heart of Darkness</i> (1899), Section 1.
	Day 4	Empire and colonialism: Joseph Conrad (continued) Readings of the day: Joseph Conrad, <i>Heart of Darkness</i> , Sections 2 and 3.
WEEK 3	Day 5	Pre-WWI literature: H. G. Wells Readings of the day: H. G. Wells, from Book One of <i>The War of the Worlds</i> (1898) (“The Coming of the Martians”): Chapters I (“The Eve of the War”), II (“The Falling Star”), V (“The Heat-Ray”), IX (“The Fighting Begins”) and XII (“What I Saw of the Destruction of Weybridge and Shepperton”).

	Day 6	WWI poetry Readings of the day: Rupert Brooke, “The Soldier” (1914); Edward Thomas, “Adlestrop” (1915), “Tears” (1915); Siegfried Sassoon, “They” (1916), “The Rear-Guard” (1917), “The General” (1917); Isaac Rosenberg, “Break of day in the Trenches” (1916), “Returning, We Hear the Larks” (1917); Wilfred Owen, “Anthem for Doomed Youth” (1917), “Dulce et Decorum Est” (1917); and Robert Graves, “Recalling War” (1935).
WEEK 4	Day 7	Modernism in prose fiction: James Joyce Readings of the day: James Joyce, “The Dead” (1914), pp. 2172-2199.
	Day 8	Modernism in prose fiction: James Joyce (continued) Readings of the day: James Joyce, “The Dead”, pp. 2185-2199.
WEEK 5	Day 9	Training session for Essay 1
	Day 10	Modernism in poetry: T. S. Eliot Readings of the day: T. S. Eliot, <i>The Waste Land</i> (1922) and “Ulysses, Order, and Myth” (1923)
WEEK 6	Day 11	Modernism in prose fiction: Virginia Woolf Readings of the day: Virginia Woolf, “Modern Fiction” (1921), extracts from <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> (1925)
	Day 12	Modernism in prose fiction: Virginia Woolf (continued) Reading of the day: Virginia Woolf, “A Room of One’s Own” (1929), Chapters I-IV.
WEEK 7	Day 13	WWII poetry <i>[Deadline: Essay 1]</i> Readings of the day: W. H. Auden, “Spain” (1937), “September 1, 1939” (1939), “Poetry as Memorable Speech” (1935); Dylan Thomas, “Ceremony after a Fire Raid”; Edith Sitwell, “Still Falls the Rain” (1942); Ted Hughes, “The Casualty” (1957), “Out” (1967); Lois Clark, “Picture from the Blitz” (1982).

	Day 14	Post WWII prose fiction: George Orwell Readings of the day: George Orwell, <i>Animal Farm</i> (1945)
WEEK 8	Day 15	Post WWII prose fiction: George Orwell (continued) Readings of the day: George Orwell, from <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i> (1949), Chapters 1, 3, 4 and 5
	Day 16	Feedback and discussion: Essay 1
WEEK 9	Day 17	Training session for Essay 2
	Day 18	Post WWII drama; the Theatre of the Absurd: Samuel Beckett Readings of the day: Samuel Beckett, <i>Endgame</i> (1957), pp. 2394-2407
WEEK 10	Day 19	Post WWII drama; the Theatre of the Absurd: Samuel Beckett (continued) Readings of the day: Samuel Beckett, <i>Endgame</i> , pp. 2408-2420
	Day 20	Screening of play: <i>Endgame</i> Directed by Conor McPherson (2000)
WEEK 11	Day 21	Post 1950s poetry Readings of the day: Ted Hughes, “Wind” (1957), “Relic” (1957), “Pike” (1960); Elizabeth Jennings, “The Painter” (1957), “A Summing-Up” (1969); Philip Larkin, “High Windows” (1967), “Sad Steps” (1974), “This Be the Verse” (1974), “Aubade” (1977); Seamus Heaney, “Digging” (1966), “Casualty” (1976), selection from “Englands of the Mind” (1976); Thom Gunn, “Black Jackets” (1961), “Still Life” (1992), and “The Missing” (1992).

	Day 22	Post 1950s prose fiction: Doris Lessing Readings of the day: Doris Lessing, “To Room Nineteen” (1963)
WEEK 12	Day 23	1980s drama: Caryl Churchill <i>[Deadline: Essay 2]</i> Readings of the day: Caryl Churchill, <i>Top Girls</i> (1982), Acts I and II
	Day 24	1980s drama: Caryl Churchill (continued) Readings of the day: Caryl Churchill, <i>Top Girls</i> , Act III
WEEK 13	Day 25	Screening of play: <i>Top Girls</i> Directed by Max Stafford-Clark (1991)
	Day 26	Contemporary poets Readings of the day: John Agard, “Listen Mr Oxford Don” (1985), “Checking Out Me History” (2007); Paul Muldoon, “Gathering Mushrooms” (1983), “The Grand Conversation” (2002); Carol Ann Duffy, “Medusa” (1999), “Mrs Lazarus” (1999); Alice Oswald, “Dunt: A Poem for a Dried up River” (2007), “A Short Story of Falling” (2016), “Rain” (2016).
WEEK 14	Day 27	Feedback and discussion: Essay 2
	Day 28	Final revision for exam