Stockholm University

Optional Literature Module: The British Novel after WWII
(7.5 credits)
Spring 2025
Teacher: Marina Ludwigs
Email: marina.ludwigs@english.su.se

Module description

No selection of novels can do justice to the astonishing variety, vigor, and innovation that characterizes British novel of the post-World War II era. This course attempts to cover various historical periods, genres, points of focus by several influential authors. Throughout the course, we will read a number of British novels that span the period of seven decades, starting from the postwar realism of the "Angry Young Men" generation through the modernist-postmodernist experimentation of the sixties through nineties, finishing with two postmillennial novels (still difficult to characterize). One of the selection criteria is the novels' importance to their own period. We will read mostly, but not exclusively, books that "made a splash," were seen as topical, and were, in other ways, noticed, written and talked about by the critics and the public at the time or soon after their publication. In asking ourselves in what ways these books are reflections of the *zeitgeist* of their time, we will read literary-historical materials and representative critical articles on the texts themselves. In our discussion, we will turn to topics of cultural and aesthetic history, tracing the trajectory of changing tastes, concerns, and the economic and technological conditions, as well as the evolution of the novelistic form.

The module comprises eight two-hour seminars, all of which involve active participation from the students. The students will read primary texts and secondary material before each seminar, using these meetings as occasions to reflect upon and voice their ideas about their reading of primary texts and understanding of the secondary material. They will be given discussion questions and asked to answer one of them in writing as homework. The final examination will be comprised of written assignment(s).

Intended learning outcomes

Upon completion of the module, students are expected to be able to:

- Account for the contents of the course literature;
- Display the ability to use basic theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field;
- Apply these concepts to literary texts;
- Analyse literary texts from a relevant theoretical perspective;
- Motivate their own analyses in writing in a manner relevant to the field;
- Display a good understanding of written English;
- Express themselves in academic English.

Grading

The module adopts the 7-grade SU scale (A–F).
To receive a final grade, students must have completed all the examination assignments [not done all examination assignments=no grade].
To receive a passing grade (A to E), students must complete all the examination assignments, pass the exam, and thus demonstrate that they achieved all the learning outcomes at least at the minimum level (as described below).

Module activities

The module consists of the following activities:

- Eight two-hour seminars (pre-seminar instructions for each seminar will be posted on Athena);
- Before each seminar, students are expected to finish the assigned reading, do any accompanying tasks, and discuss the texts and tasks in groups. Students should be prepared to discuss the reading and tasks at the seminar;
- Students are expected to complete all the tasks assigned by the teacher.

Examination

Students are required to complete the following:

- Oral presentation: a structured presentation discussing and comparing recurring themes and motifs in a selection of works from the reading list: pass/fail grading
- Analytical essay: a research-led argument essays of 2000 words +/- 10%, which must make reference both to primary sources and to at least two secondary peer reviewed sources: A-F grading scale.

Module format

The module will take place in the form of seminars, where students will practice analyzing literary texts in terms of the specific historical, generic and critical perspectives dealt with in the course, as well as develop their skills in providing textual support for their reading.

Seminars are intended to be active, hands-on opportunities for students to practice the skills they will learn throughout the module; for this reason, the students should bring the assigned text(s) with them to every seminar.

Required reading

Primary Texts:

Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim*, 1954
Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, 1958
Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, 1961
Colin Wilson, *The Mind Parasites*, 1967
Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, 1973
Ian McEwan, *Enduring Love*, 1997
Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending*, 2011
Kazuo Ishiguro, *Klara and the Sun*, 2021

Secondary Readings:

The Cambridge companion to British Fiction Since 1945, 2015, online [selections].
A Companion to British and Irish Novel: 1945-2000, ed. Brian W. Shaffer, 2005, online [selections].
Carpenter, Humphrey, *Angry Young Men: A Literary Comedy of the 50ies*, 2002 [selections/handouts].
Gasiorek, Andrzej, *Post-War British Fiction: Realism and After*, 1995, [handouts].
Stenseke, Jakob, "The Morality of Artificial Friends in Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*," *Journal of Sciemce Fiction and Philosophy*, vol. 5, 2022 [handout].

Wallen, James Ramsey, “The Evils of Banality: Shallowness, Self-Realization, and Closure in Julian Barnes’s *The Sense pf an Ending* and Oscar Wilde’s *De Profundis*.” Critiue: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, 58:4 (2017), pp. 325-339 [handout]

Schedule

Unit	**Set reading/Oral presentations/Homework**
1. Introduction	Comin Wilson, *The Mind Parasites.* Read the introduction by Gary Lachman. *Angry Young Men* handout.
2. Angry Young Men	Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim.* *Angry Young Men* handout. Student oral presentations. Written answer to one discussion question.
3. Angry Young Men, continued	Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning.* Post-War British Fiction handout. Student oral presentations. Written answer to one discussion question**.**
4. Formal experimentations	Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie.* *A Companion to British and Irish Novel: 1945-2000*, ch. 26. Student oral presentations. Written answer to one discussion question.
5. Formal experimentations, continued	Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince*. *The Cambridge companion to British Fiction Since 1945*, 2015, ch.11. Student oral presentations. Written answer to one discussion question**.**
6. Postmodernism	Ian McEwan, *Enduring Love.* *A Companion to British and Irish Novel: 1945-2000,* ch. 38. Student oral presentations. Written answer to one discussion question**.**
7. Postmillennial literature	Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending.* Wallen article. Student oral presentations. Written answer to one discussion question.
8. Postmillennial literature, continued	Kazuo Ishiguro, *Klara and the Sun* Stenseke article. Student oral presentations. Written answer to one discussion question**.**

Deadlines for submission and resubmission of the final assignment.
Submission: May, 30, 2025. Resubmission: August 15, 2025.

Please note that there may be occasional changes to seminar dates/times and rooms. Check Time Edit regularly for updates.

Module grading criteria

	A	B	C	D	E	Fx	F
	excellent skills in	**very good skills in**	**good skills in**	**satisfactory skills in**	**adequate skills in**	**Inadequate skills in**	**Totally inadequate skills in**
Overview of material	accounting for the contents of the course literature	accounting for the contents of the course literature	accounting for the contents of the course literature	accounting for the contents of the course literature	accounting for the contents of the course literature	The student has displayed some, but not all, of the skills of the level of the criteria for E.	The student's work does not demonstrate the achievement of the course outcomes at a minimally adequate level.
Discussion	displaying the ability to use basic theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field, and applying these concepts to literary texts	displaying the ability to use basic theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field,, and applying these concepts to literary texts	displaying the ability to use basic theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field, and applying these concepts to literary texts	displaying the ability to use basic theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field, and applying these concepts to literary texts	displaying the ability to use basic theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field, and applying these concepts to literary texts		
Analysis	analysing literary texts from a relevant theoretical perspective critically, and motivating their own analyses in writing in a manner relevant to the field	analysing literary texts from a relevant theoretical perspective critically, and motivating their own analyses in writing in a manner relevant to the field	analysing literary texts from a relevant theoretical perspective critically, and motivating their own analyses in writing in a manner relevant to the field	analysing literary texts from a relevant theoretical perspective critically, and motivating their own analyses in writing in a manner relevant to the field	analysing literary texts from a relevant theoretical perspective critically, and motivating their own analyses in writing in a manner relevant to the field		
Comprehension	displaying a good understanding of written English	displaying a good understanding of written English	displaying a good understanding of written English	displaying a good understanding of written English	displaying a good understanding of written English		
Expression	expressing themselves in academic English	expressing themselves in academic English	expressing themselves in academic English	expressing themselves in academic English	expressing themselves in academic English		