



Brexit Britain

Syllabus

Let's get this out of the way: Like summer term, winter term 2020/21 will be an experiment in pandemic pedagogics; it is also my first term at Goethe-University, so please bear with me! I look forward to experimenting with new forms of (online) teaching, but I will need your help. Please keep in touch, take part in the Zoom classes, and use the forum/wiki/padlet for asynchronous coursework (timelines, study questions, book reviews – tasks specified below). Most importantly, please let me (and the other course members) know if something does not work for you or if you have different ideas about how to do things. Let's do this together!

class:

- **Thursday, 14:15-15:45 [online]**

As Zoom is not the perfect medium for everyone (and some of you might struggle with technical issues) the seminar will combine synchronous Zoom classes and asynchronous sessions (see schedule & tasks below).

contact:

- [office: 4.154 IG-Farben-Haus]
- **e-mail:**
- **office hours:** Tuesday, 9:00-10:30 (and on appointment) on Zoom – please send me an e-mail for the Zoom link.
- **twitter:** @susannegruss

resources:

- **OLAT:**

literature:

- You need to **buy** the following primary texts (listed in the order of discussion in class):
 - (1) Ali Smith, *Autumn* (2016)
 - (2) John Lanchester, *The Wall* (2019)
 - (3) Adam Thorpe, *Missing Fay* (2019)
 - (4) Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West* (2017)
- Please make sure that you have (streaming) access to the following films:
 - (1) Toby Haynes, *Brexit: The Uncivil War* (2019)
 - (2) Joe Wright, *Darkest Hour* (2017)
- Apart from these longer primary texts, all **other texts** that are mandatory reading are available on OLAT.
- Please check the **bibliography** for further references (full bibliographical details, further reading).

course description:

Ever since the Brexit referendum in 2016, the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union has dominated British news (at least before the Corona pandemic started to overshadow politics in early 2020). Brexit has also seeped into contemporary literature and other cultural productions. In this seminar, we will look at a broad spectrum of texts that tackle the entangled questions of Brexit, British (English?) identity, migration politics in postcolonial Britain, and cultural memory. We will read Ali Smith's *Autumn* (2016) as one of the first 'Brexit' novels, analyse the dystopian politics of John Lanchester's *The Wall* (2019), discuss the depiction of (middle) England as the so-called 'ground zero' of Brexit in Adam Thorpe's *Missing Fay* (2017), and the question of (post)colonial migration in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017). In order to complement the Brexit aspects of this course, we will watch and discuss the *Guardian's* Brexit shorts (2017, available on YouTube), Toby Haynes's *Brexit: The Uncivil War* (2019, Channel 4), and Joe Wright's neo-historical *Darkest Hour* (2017).



e-mail and Zoom etiquette:

- Please give me some time to answer your **e-mails** (up to 3 or 4 days). I will not write e-mails after 8pm or on weekends.
- The usual: Please **mute yourself** if you are not talking. If you feel uncomfortable talking into the camera (or if you have connection issues), feel free to use the **chat** to contribute to class discussions.
- I obviously won't (and can't) force anyone to turn on their **camera** when we zoom but would still kindly ask you to do so (or drop me a brief note at the beginning of term explaining why you would rather not). Yes, staring at yourself onscreen can be cringeworthy, but if we want to use Zoom to create a **seminar experience**, being able to see each other's faces and nonverbal communication just makes everything so much easier for me (and you). Imagine trying to keep a discussion going while staring into a void of black rectangles.
- Most of us will zoom from our **private spaces** – this means that my kids might make an appearance at some point (sorry). Zoom bombing family members, flatmates or pets are always welcome! Added bonus: you get to eat and drink during classes (as long as you have muted yourself, see above).
- Our Zoom seminar should be a **safe space** for everyone. Recording (parts of) sessions or taking (and posting) screenshots is an absolute no-go. All material shared onscreen will be made available to you on OLAT.
- I am not exempt from the occasional **technical blip** – please be patient if I freeze and simply carry on with your discussion. Like the terminator, I will be back, promised.
- **Be kind (to yourself, to each other, and to me).**

course performance & requirements:

- Apart from preparing the **compulsory reading**, please stick to the tasks detailed in the course schedule below.
- I expect you to take part in class **regularly** and **actively**, both in synchronous and asynchronous sessions. As indicated below, I will use your activity in the forum to track participation. Communication is key, so talk to me if you are struggling.
- For **asynchronous sessions**, I have indicated the tasks I expect you to cover over the week in the schedule below. This should not take more time than the 90-minute course slot (plus the time you would normally take to read/prepare for class).
- Instead of an oral presentation, **each** of you is expected to write at **least two 1½–2 page book reviews**. Please write an academic book review focussing not only on plot, but also on the Brexit context of the seminar. Please hand in the book reviews on the date specified in the schedule below. I will read them and send you feedback. For those of you who do not need a term paper but an **assignment**, please revise and slightly extend your book reviews (2x **3 pages**) and hand them in by the end of term at the latest.

term paper:

- If you need to write a term paper for this course, please stick to the department's style sheet and attend the Zoom session of term papers.
- You can, of course, use ideas developed in your books reviews as part of your term paper – see the book reviews as an exercise in academic writing.
- Developing a topic **independently** and coming up with a suitable **thesis** is part of your assignment. Please talk to me/chat with me as soon as possible – I will not accept & grade your term paper if I have not talked to you about your topic.



 mandatory reading / viewing

 to do

 background reading

01 05.11.20
Zoom

organisation

Brexit brainstorming – from Brexit to Corona & back again

to read, to watch, to do:

- F. O'Toole, "Coronavirus has exposed the myth of British exceptionalism" (*Guardian*) 

task: Please have a quick look at the forum **before we start** and introduce yourself (including your pronouns) – if you want to, you can also upload a selfie and/or a picture of your workspace. And if you have a pet, upload a pic for us (pretty please).

02 12.11.20

A Brexit Timeline

food for thought: Brexit short 1 (A. Morgan, "The End")

to read, to watch, to do:

- A. Morgan, "The End" (YouTube) 
- C. Wiegand, "Brexit Shorts: Giving Voice to a Divided Britain Through New Dramas" 
- research Brexit timeline 

tasks:

- Answer the **forum question** and engage with the others' entries – there will be an open question for every asynchronous week of this seminar, and I will use your forum questions to track participation.
- Add your thoughts about A. Morgan's "The End" to the **Brexit shorts wiki**. For each Brexit short, I am looking for (a) a short summary, (b) some info on the playwright & the actor(s), (c) your general thoughts/viewing response, (d) specific Brexit elements in the short.
- In a final step, use the **Padlet** (link in today's OLAT session) to add the results of your research to the **Brexit timeline**.
- Please take the **minute paper** (link in today's OLAT session) for some feedback – we will discuss your questions at the beginning of next session!

We will evaluate your experience of this asynchronous session at the beginning of our next (Zoom) session.

03 19.11.20
Zoom

Toby Haynes, *Brexit: The Uncivil War* (2017)

viewing response – Brexit & the rise of populism

to read, to watch, to do:

- watch the film 
- T. Docherty, "Brexit: Thinking and Resistance" 
- reviews (*The Atlantic*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*) 

tasks:

- Read Docherty's article carefully and take some notes – what are his main theses? do you (dis)agree? why?
- Please take the **minute paper** (link in today's OLAT session) for some feedback – I will upload results & answers to open questions in the folder for next session!



04 26.11.20

Ali Smith, *Autumn* (2017) 1

reading response – Brexlit

food for thought: Brexit short 2 (G. Owen, “The Pines”)to read, to watch, to do:

- read the novel 
- K. Shaw, “Brexlit” 
- G. Owen, “The Pines” (YouTube) 
- hand in a 1½–2 page **book review** (keep in mind that you need to write two for the seminar) 
- A.-J. Zwierlein & J. Rostek, “Literatures of Brexit: An Introduction”; P. Rau, “*Autumn* after the Referendum” 

tasks:

- Answer the **forum question** and engage with the others’ entries – please start your answer with a brief **reading response** (What did you think about Smith’s novel? What are the Brexit elements? Which topics would you like to discuss?).
- Read Shaw’s article and **take notes** – how is Brexlit defined? do you have any issues with the definition? Then watch my **Brexlit video** (link in today’s OLAT session). Do let me know if you have any questions!
- Add your thoughts about G Owen’s “The Pines” to the **Brexit shorts wiki**.
- Please take the **minute paper** (link in today’s OLAT session) for some feedback – we will discuss your questions at the beginning of next session!

05 03.12.20

Zoom**Ali Smith, *Autumn* (2017) 2**

Brexit & (cultural) memory

food for thought: Brexit short 3 (J. Graham, “Burn”)to read, to watch, to do:

- J. Graham, “Burn” (YouTube) 
- A. Assmann, “Memory, Individual and Collective” 
- M. Tönnies & D. Henneböhl, “Negotiating Images of (Un-)Belonging and (Divided) Communities: Ali Smith’s Seasonal Quartet as a Counter-Narrative to Brexit.” 

tasks:

- Read Assmann’s article carefully and take some notes – what are her main theses? how does she define the different kinds of ‘memory’?
- Please take the **minute paper** (link in today’s OLAT session) for some feedback – I will upload results & answers to open questions in the folder for next session!

06 10.12.20

John Lanchester, *The Wall* (2019) 1

reading response – Brexit &/as dystopia?

to read, to watch, to do:

- read the novel 
- hand in a 1½–2 page **book review** (keep in mind that you need to write two for seminar) 
- P. Fitting, “Utopia, Dystopia & Science Fiction” 
- B. Stableford, “Ecology and Dystopia” 



tasks:

- Answer the **forum question** and engage with the others' entries – please start your answer with a brief **reading response** (What did you think about Lanchester's novel? What are the Brexit elements? Which topics would you like to discuss?).
- Watch my **video on utopia/dystopia** (link in today's OLAT session). Do let me know if you have any questions!
- Which **passages** would you discuss in depth in next week's close readings? Post them (and a brief explanation) in the **forum**.
- Please take the **minute paper** (link in today's OLAT session) for some feedback – we will discuss your questions at the beginning of next session!

07 17.12.20

Zoom

John Lanchester, *The Wall* (2019) 2

close readings

food for thought: Brexit short 4 (M. Peake, "Shattered")to read, to watch, to do:

- M. Peake, "Shattered" (YouTube) 
- reviews (*The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Vulture*) 

tasks:

- Read the reviews of *The Wall* carefully and take some notes – do you agree/disagree with the reviewers (and why)?
- Please take the **minute paper** (link in today's OLAT session) for some feedback – I will upload results & answers to open questions in the folder for next session!

🎄 **Christmas Break** 🎄

08 14.01.21

Jo Wright, *Darkest Hour* (2017)

viewing response – Brexit, nostalgia & the historical film

to read, to watch, to do:

- watch the film 
- G. Fuller, "Gary Oldman: Mad Dogs and Englishmen" 
- R. A. Rosenstone, "The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age" [Google Books] 
- R. Eaglestone, "Cruel Nostalgia and the Memory of the Second World War" 

tasks:

- Answer the **forum question** and engage with the others' entries – please start your answer with a brief **reading response** (What did you think about Wright's film? What are the Brexit elements? Which topics would you like to discuss?).
- Watch my **video on nostalgia** (link in today's OLAT session). Do let me know if you have any questions!
- Do you have **specific questions** about writing an academic paper / an abstract for next session? Post them in the **forum**.
- Please take the **minute paper** (link in today's OLAT session) for some feedback – we will discuss your questions at the beginning of next session!



09 21.01.21

Zoom

Theatre after Brexit

food for thought: Brexit shorts 5-7 (C. James, "Go Home"; D. Hare, "Time to Leave"; S. Gregg, "Your Ma's a Hard Brexit")

Term Papers

to read, to watch, to do:

- M. Peake, "Shattered"; C. James, "Go Home"; D. Hare, "Time to Leave"; S. Gregg, "Your Ma's a Hard Brexit" (YouTube) 
- hand in a potential topic / thesis / abstract for your term paper 
- A. Sierz, "British Theatre After Brexit: One Year On" 
- M. Tronicke, "Imperial Pasts, Dystopian Futures, and the Theatre of Brexit" (662-675) 

tasks:

- Think about your **term paper**! Ideally, you should have developed a rough idea by now – today is the day to articulate this idea in class and get some (peer) feedback.
- Please take the **minute paper** (link in today's OLAT session) for some feedback – I will upload results & answers to open questions in the folder for next session!

10 28.01.21

Adam Thorpe, *Missing Fay* (2017) 1

reading response – Brexit, class & austerity politics

to read, to watch, to do:

- read the novel 
- hand in a 1½–2 page **book review** (keep in mind that you need to write two for the seminar) 
- from G. Evans & J. Tilley, *The New Politics of Class: The Political Exclusion of the British Working Class* 
- G. Sedlmayr, "Communication Breakdown: The Brexit Referendum, British Austerity Policies and Their Negotiation in Culture" 

tasks:

- Answer the **forum question** and engage with the others' entries – please start your answer with a brief **reading response** (What did you think about Thorpe's novel? What are the Brexit elements? Which topics would you like to discuss?).
- Watch my **video on class & austerity** (link in today's OLAT session). Do let me know if you have any questions!
- Which **passages** would you discuss in depth in next week's close readings? Post them (and a brief explanation) in the **forum**.
- Please take the **minute paper** (link in today's OLAT session) for some feedback – we will discuss your questions at the beginning of next session!

11 04.02.21

Zoom

Adam Thorpe, *Missing Fay* (2017) 2

close readings

food for thought: Brexit shorts 8 & 9 (M. Syal, "Just a T-Shirt"; AL Kennedy, "Eternal Sunshine")

to read, to watch, to do:

- M. Syal, "Just a T-Shirt"; AL Kennedy, "Eternal Sunshine" (YouTube) 
- reviews (*Financial Times*, *Guardian*, *Irish Times*) 

tasks:

- Read the reviews of *Missing Fay* carefully and take some notes – do you agree/disagree with the reviewers (and why)?
- Please take the **minute paper** (link in today's OLAT session) for some feedback – I will upload results & answers to open questions in the folder for next session!



12 11.02.21

Moshin Hamid, *Exit West* (2017) 1

reading response – Brexit, migration & racism

to read, to watch, to do:

- read the novel 
- hand in a 1½–2 page **book review** (keep in mind that you need to write two for the seminar) 
- A. Mukherjee, “Migrant Britain” 
- S. Sadaf, “‘We are all migrants through time’: History and Geography in Moshin Hamid’s *Exit West*” (636-647) 

tasks:

- Answer the **forum question** and engage with the others’ entries – please start your answer with a brief **reading response** (What did you think about Moshin’s novel? What are the Brexit elements? Which topics would you like to discuss?).
- Watch my **video on migration & racism** (link in today’s OLAT session). Do let me know if you have any questions!
- Which **passages** would you discuss in depth in next week’s close readings? Post them (and a brief explanation) in the **forum**.
- Please take the **minute paper** (link in today’s OLAT session) for some feedback – we will discuss your questions at the beginning of next session!

13 18.02.21

Zoom

Moshin Hamid, *Exit West* (2017) 2

Brexit & Empire

Round-Up & Open Questionsto read, to watch, to do:

- P. Gilroy, from *Postcolonial Melancholia* 
- A. A. Mondal, “Scratching the Post-Imperial Itch” (82-91) 
- R. Cummings, “Ain’t no black in the (Brexit) Union Jack? Race and Empire in the Era of Brexit and the *Windrush Scandal*” (593-606) 

task:

- Read Gilroy’s article carefully and take some notes – what are his main theses? how does he define ‘postcolonial melancholia’? and how does this (possibly) tie in with Brexit?

Easter Egg: Finished reading the complete syllabus? Well done! Now please log on to OLAT (see link above), sign into the course, go to the forum (thread 00) and post your favourite meme to let me know that you are done. Please e-mail me if you cannot access OLAT (I am still trying to figure out how OLAT works, so this might be entirely my mistake).

Literature

primary literature:

Brexit shorts (scripts):

- 1) Graham, James. “Burn.” *The Guardian*, 26 June 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jun/26/burn-a-new-play-by-james-graham-brexit-shorts>, accessed 20 April 2020.
- 2) Gregg, Stacey. “Your Ma’s a Hard Brexit.” *The Guardian*, 19 June 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jun/19/your-mas-a-hard-brexit-a-new-play-by-stacey-gregg-brexit-shorts>, accessed 20 April 2020.
- 3) Hare, David. “Time to Leave.” *The Guardian*, 19 June 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jun/19/time-to-leave-a-new-play-by-david-hare-brexit-shorts>, accessed 20 April 2020.
- 4) James, Charlene. “Go Home.” *The Guardian*, 19 June 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jun/19/go-home-charlene-james-brexit-shorts>, accessed 20 April 2020.



- 5) Kennedy, AL. "Eternal Sunshine." *The Guardian*, 19 June 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jun/19/permanent-sunshine-a-new-play-by-al-kennedy-brexit-shorts>, accessed 20 April 2020.
- 6) Morgan, Abi. "The End." *The Guardian*, 26 June 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jun/26/the-end-a-new-play-by-abi-morgan-brexit-shorts>, accessed 20 April 2020.
- 7) Owen, Gary. "The Pines." *The Guardian*, 26 June 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jun/26/the-pines-a-new-play-by-gary-owen-brexit-shorts>, accessed 20 April 2020.
- 8) Peake, Maxine. "Shattered." *The Guardian*, 26 June 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jun/26/shattered-a-new-play-by-maxine-peake-brexit-shorts>, accessed 20 April 2020.
- 9) Syal, Meera. "Just a T-Shirt." *The Guardian*, 19 June 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jun/19/just-a-t-shirt-a-new-play-by-meera-syal-brexit-shorts>, accessed 20 April 2020.

Hamid, Mohsin. *Exit West*. London: Penguin, 2017.

Haynes, Toby. *Brexit: The Uncivil War*. Channel 4 / HBO, 2019.

Lanchester, John. *The Wall*. London: faber & faber, 2019.

Smith, Ali. *Autumn*. London: Penguin, 2017.

Thorpe, Adam. *Missing Fay*. London: Vintage, 2018.

Wright, Joe. *Darkest Hour*. Focus Features / Universal Pictures, 2017.

recommended literature:

Eaglestone, Robert, ed. *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018.

Habermann, Ina, ed. *The Road to Brexit: A Cultural Perspective on British Attitudes to Europe*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020.

Koegler, Caroline, Pavan Kumar Malreddy, and Marlena Tronicke, eds. *Writing Brexit: Colonial Remains*. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56.5 (2020).

O'Toole, Fintan. *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain*. Lonon: Head of Zeus, 2019.

Rostek, Joanna and Anne-Julia Zwierlein, eds. *Brexit and the Divided United Kingdom*. Special Issue *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 25.1 (2019).

Zwierlein, Anne-Julia, Joanna Rostek, and Ina Habermann, eds. *Literatures of Brexit*. Special Issue *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 26.2 (2019).

secondary literature:

Assmann, Aleida. "Memory, Individual and Collective." *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*. Ed. Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. 211-224.

Cummings, Ronald. "Ain't no black in the (Brexit) Union Jack? Race and Empire in the Era of Brexit and the *Windrush* Scandal." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56.5 (2020): 593-606.

Docherty, Thomas. "Brexit: Thinking and Resistance." *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*. Ed. Robert Eaglestone. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018. 181-195.

Eaglestone, Robert. "Cruel Nostalgia and the Memory of the Second World War." *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*. Ed. Robert Eaglestone. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018. 92-104.

Evans, Geoffrey and James Tilley. *The New Politics of Class: The Political Exclusion of the British Working Class*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Fitting, Peter. "Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Ed. Gregory Claeys. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 135-153.

Fuller, Graham. "Gary Oldman: Mad Dogs and Englishmen." *Sight and Sound* 28.1 (2018): 56-60.

Gilroy, Paul. *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Koegler, Caroline, Pavan Kumar Malreddy, and Marlena Tronicke. "The Colonial Remains of Brexit: Empire Nostalgia and Narcissistic Nationalism." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56.5 (2020): 585-592.

Korte, Barbara and Christian Mair, "New-Old Rifts: Brexit and Resurfacing Racism in the United Kingdom." *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 26.1 (2019): 73-86.

Mondal, Anshuman A. "Scratching the Post-Imperial Itch." *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*. Ed. Robert Eaglestone. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018. 82-91.

Mukherjee, Ankhi. "Migrant Britain." *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*. Ed. Robert Eaglestone. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018. 73-81.

O'Toole, Fintan. "Coronavirus Has Exposed the Myth of British Exceptionalism." *The Guardian*, 11 April 2020.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/11/coronavirus-exposed-myth-british-exceptionalism>, last accessed 14 April 2020.

Rau, Petra. "Autumn After the Referendum." *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*. Ed. Robert Eaglestone. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018. 31-43.

Rosenstone, Robert A. "The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age." *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*. Ed. Marcia Landy. Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2001. 50-66.



- Sadaf, Shazia. "'We are all migrants through time': History and Geography in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56.5 (2020): 636-647.
- Sedlmayr, Gerold. "Communication Breakdown: The Brexit Referendum, British Austerity Policies and Their Negotiation in Culture." *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 26.1 (2019): 31-44.
- Shaw, Kristian. "Brexit." *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*. Ed. Robert Eaglestone. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018. 15-30.
- Sierz, Aleks. "British Theatre After Brexit: One Year On." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 40.3 (2018): 60-70.
- Stableford, Brian. "Ecology and Dystopia." *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Ed. Gregory Claeys. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 259-281.
- Tönnies, Merle and Dennis Henneböhl, "Negotiating Images of (Un-)Belonging and (Divided) Communities: Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet as a Counter-Narrative to Brexit." *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 26.2 (2019): 181-193.
- Tronicke, Marlena. "Imperial Pasts, Dystopian Futures, and the Theatre of Brexit." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56.5 (2020): 662-675.
- Wiegand, Chris. "Brexit Shorts: Giving Voice to a Divided Britain Through New Dramas." *The Guardian*, 23 June 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/membership/2017/jun/23/brexit-shorts-giving-voice-divided-britain-dramas>, last accessed 20 April 2020.
- Zwierlein, Anne-Julia and Joanna Rostek. "Literatures of Brexit: An Introduction." *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 26.2 (2019): 125-140.

