

## Full Module Description, 2010/11

<b>Module Title:</b>	<b>The 21<sup>st</sup> Century British Novel</b>
<b>Module Short Name:</b>	
<b>SITS Name:</b>	

<b>Module Provider (AOU):</b>		<b>Subject (3 letters):</b>	<b>ELI</b>
<b>Level:</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Number of Credits:</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Module Co-ordinator:</b>	<b>CE</b>		

<b>Module Availability:</b>	<b>FT</b>
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### Assessment Pattern

<b>Unit(s) of Assessment</b>	<b>Weighting Towards Module Mark ( %)</b>
Essay (3000 words)	100%

<b>Qualifying Condition(s)</b> None
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### Module Overview

This module offers students the opportunity to explore the British novel and its formal and thematic developments from 2000 to the present day. "British" is understood here as an inclusive concept that is increasingly being articulated through debates concerning transnational and cosmopolitan migrations and exchanges, and contemporary British novels play an important role in shaping and exploring new ways of constructing identity.

The novels studied in this module are grouped around the core generic, political and conceptual frameworks of: (1) challenges to realism and aesthetic experimentation; (2) the proliferation of apocalyptic imaginaries and ecological futurities; (3) the role of atheism and secular discourse after 9/11 transformed global perceptions of terror and its relationship with religious fundamentalism; and (4) developments in the vocabularies of multiculturalism, globalization and cosmopolitan subjectivities.

Through a focused study of 21<sup>st</sup> century British fiction and its conceptual and political contexts, as well as engagement with at least one visiting contemporary writer, this module is designed to equip students to understand the contemporary literary and academic landscape in the UK, and to support students to pursue their own personal research interests in the contemporary novel as a vital literary form today and part of a thriving publishing industry.

### Pre-requisite/Co-requisites

None
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### Module Aims

The module aims to develop knowledge in:

- The development of the novel in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and its relationship with previous paradigms of literary study
- The variety of generic forms being adapted, challenged and reworked in 21<sup>st</sup> century British prose fiction
- The issues that contemporary novels are engaged with and the importance of fiction as a

crucial platform for political engagement

- The variety of methodological approaches being used and extended for the 21<sup>st</sup> century novel, and the importance of comparative literary and theoretical vocabularies in reading contemporary prose fiction
- The role of utopian and dystopian critique and the revival of religious imaginaries in 21<sup>st</sup>-century fiction

## Learning Outcomes

Module outcomes:

- Develop a critical understanding of the novel as a generic form in 21<sup>st</sup>-century writing
- Develop a familiarity with related critical terms, such as cosmopolitanism, realism, apocalypticism and messianism, new agencies such as the “multitude”, post-secularism, and the new atheism
- Apply theoretical and critical material to the study of literary texts
- Intervene analytically in debates concerning 21<sup>st</sup>-century life, politics and culture
- Develop discursive skills through essay writing, oral skills through seminar and roundtable participation, and analytical skills through close textual reading
- Understand the relationship between critical literary studies, fiction and the contemporary publishing industry and consider the process of canon formation
- Engage with at least one well-known and published British writer

## Module Content

### Week 1

#### INTRODUCTION TO 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY BRITISH FICTIONS

What do we mean when we say “British” fiction and how useful is the model of the nation-state in categorising an area of literary study? This seminar will explore the work of key literature scholars who are shifting the analytical terrain for studying the British novel in several crucial ways: beyond the boundaries of the United Kingdom to explore Britain’s relationship with Europe, North America and emerging regional power blocs in East Asia; rethinking the role of concepts of multiculturalism, citizenship and globalization after the impact of 9/11 on political thinking; beyond the theoretical framework of postmodernism and British “historiographic metafiction” that dominated scholarship towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; questioning what aesthetic strategies are emerging in the “transitional” fictions of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century; the process of canon formation on contemporary writers.

#### Seminar Reading:

Philip Tew, “Contemporary Britishness: Who, What, Why and When?” in *The Contemporary British Novel* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 28-58

Berthold Schoene, “Introduction” in *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 1-34

Dominic Head, “Beyond 2000” in *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 224-259

### Week 2

#### MULTICULTURALISM AND THE COSMOPOLITAN NOVEL

This seminar will consider the effects of cosmopolitan literary practices as a tool for questioning normative representations of gender, culture and ethnicity and their effects on the canonisation of 21<sup>st</sup> century British fiction. We will discuss Zadie Smith’s highly acclaimed first novel *White Teeth*

(2000) and the ways in which the novel represents complex mediations within British communities through issues of immigration, class, religious sectarianism and political activism. We will also consider the role of the increasingly globalised literary prize culture and its effects on postcolonial writers like Smith through the publishing industry's tendency to market ethnic tokenism and exotic "otherness."

**Seminar Reading:**

Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (2000)

**Week 3**

Continuing our discussion of the cosmopolitan imagination in British fiction, this seminar will consider David Mitchell's second novel *number9dream* (2001). Mitchell has become distinguished for his aesthetic and structural innovation and *number9dream* offers a fascinating example of the ways in which contemporary British writers are exploring increasingly interconnected, global landscapes by rethinking the boundaries of the novel form and its tradition of realism. Mitchell offers us a rich array of realities and textualities, hybridising genres and layering multiple alternate plot lines to construct a structurally and aesthetically complex novel that offers a new kind of narrative cosmopolitan outlook.

**Seminar Reading:**

David Mitchell, *number9dream* (2001)

**Week 4**

**BEYOND REALISM, BEYOND BRITAIN**

This seminar will consider the resurgent "realism versus experimentalism" debate with reference to Kazuo Ishiguro's fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans* (2000). We will consider how Ishiguro's experimental narrative strategies mediate between realist narrative codes, surreal imaginaries, and the genre of detective fiction; and reflect upon critical work that positions Ishiguro as a diasporic, postcolonial and cosmopolitan writer.

**Seminar Reading:**

Kazuo Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans* (2000)

**Week 5**

Continuing with the critical framework of the realism/experimentalism dichotomy, this seminar will consider Ali Smith's second novel, *Hotel World* (2001). Smith weaves together a disparately-connected community of female voices in the novel, developing polyvocal narrative strands that explore the boundaries between language and corporeality through a communal "we" perspective. Commonly used in women's writing, we will consider the ways in which Smith's use of "multiple narration" reconceives literary realism and intersubjective relations.

**Seminar Reading:**

Ali Smith, *Hotel World* (2001)

**Week 6**

**ATHEISM AFTER 9/11**

Part of Canongate's "The Myths" series (2005-), Philip Pullman's latest novel *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ* (2010) reconsiders the historical figure of Jesus and the function of

storytelling and mythologisation. Entering vigorously into debates concerning a contemporary “postsecularist” shift, Pullman – who has publicly declared his admiration for the writings of Richard Dawkins – represents one of several 21<sup>st</sup> century British novelists who are staking out a new front in the ideological war against religious fundamentalism and neoconservative indictments of religious terror after 9/11. This seminar will consider Pullman’s text in light of the periodisation of “post-9/11” literature and criticism, and explore the role of contemporary fiction in highly politicised debates concerning religious belief.

**Seminar Reading:**

Philip Pullman, *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ* (2010)

**Week 7**

This seminar will continue the discussion concerning fiction and its capacity for secular experiences of the transcendental in the “post-9/11” period. We will discuss Ian McEwan’s eighth novel *Atonement* (2001) and the ways in which it reflects upon the possibilities and limitations of the novel as a literary and philosophical form. McEwan has been credited with foreshadowing the attack on the WTO Twin Towers in his pre-9/11 fiction, and in his non-fictional writing he defends fiction’s capacity for redemption. We will consider whether *Atonement* as a fiction successfully achieves this redemptive imaginative space and how its deeply flawed narrator allows us to reflect on the novelistic moral imagination.

**Seminar Reading:**

Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (2001)

**Week 8**

**GENRE AND THE TRANSNATIONAL**

This seminar will explore the rise in post-apocalyptic and eco-catastrophe British narratives over the last decade with reference to Jeanette Winterson’s recent novel *The Stone Gods* (2007). In particular, award-winning “literary” novelists like Winterson utilise generic elements borrowed from the SF “genre” tradition (particularly the sub-genre of post-apocalypticism), and we will discuss Winterson’s utopian/dystopian landscape and posthumanist relationships, as well as how successful the novel is in terms of genre, tone and structure.

**Seminar Reading:**

Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods* (2007)

**Week 9**

This seminar will consider another aspect of “genre” fiction by exploring the revival of crime fiction in David Peace’s fictionalisation of the 1984-5 Miner’s Strike, *GB84* (2004). A hugely successful and critically acclaimed (but largely “pre-canonical”) novelist, Peace has developed the crime genre through his distinctive and brutally gritty “Yorkshire Noir” novels in the “Red Riding Quartet” (1999-2002). Now living in Japan, Peace is one of a series of British novelists whose work is heavily influenced by his expatriation and we will discuss the relationship between genre fiction and transnational imaginaries. In particular, we will consider Peace’s aesthetic innovation in combining the political thriller with a modernist experimentalism, asking how effective the crime genre is to open up “unknown histories” in this state-of-the-nation novel.

**Seminar Reading:**

David Peace, *GB84* (2004)

----- EASTER BREAK -----

## **Week 10**

### **THE PROBLEM OF SPECULATIVE FICTION**

#### **Seminar roundtable with guest speaker China Miéville**

This seminar roundtable will consider the status of the speculative imagination in 21<sup>st</sup> century British fiction. With reference to China Miéville's recent novel *Embassytown* (2011), we will explore the problematic status of the genres of SF and fantasy in contemporary literature and literary theorisation. Whilst SF has become an established as a "literature of cognitive estrangement" and a booming literary discipline in recent years, the umbrella term of "fantasy" fiction (encompassing "weird" fiction, pulp horror, ghost stories, slipstream and the New Weird) has remained subject to charges of political and aesthetic conservatism and of being badly written. We will discuss how useful such taxonomic distinctions are and how pervasive questions of literary taste and judgment continue to be in 21<sup>st</sup> century literary production.

#### **Seminar Reading:**

China Miéville, *Embassytown* (2011)

## **Week 11**

### **REVISION SEMINAR**

This seminar will consider the fictional texts and literary theorisations covered over the module. Students will present group oral presentations of the key areas covered in the module (with each individual speaking for 7 minutes): (1) Multiculturalism and the Cosmopolitan Novel; (2) Beyond Realism, Beyond Britain; (3) Atheism After 9/11; (4) Genre and the Transnational; (5) The Problem of Speculative Fiction.

**Assessment Deadline: tbc**

### **Methods of Teaching/Learning**

Weekly seminar

### **Selected Texts/Journals**

#### **ESSENTIAL READING:**

Kazuo Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans* (2000)  
Ali Smith, *The Accidental* (2005)  
Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods* (2007)  
David Peace, *GB84* (2004)  
Philip Pullman, *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ* (2010)  
Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (2001)  
Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (2000)  
David Mitchell, *number9dream* (2001)  
China Miéville, *Embassytown* (2011)

#### **RECOMMENDED SECONDARY READING:**

**Critical Studies in Contemporary British Fiction:**

- Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel* (London: Continuum, 2004)
- Berthold Schoene, *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009)
- Philip Tew, Fiona Tolan and Leigh Wilson, *Writers Talk: Conversations with Contemporary British Novelists* (London: Continuum, 2008)
- Fiona Tolan, *New Directions: Writing Post 1990* (London: Longman, 2010)
- Rod Mengham and Philip Tew, *British Fiction Today* (London: Continuum, 2006)
- Peter Childs, *Contemporary Novelists: British Fiction Since 1970* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)
- Matt McGuire, *Contemporary Scottish Literature* (London: Palgrave, 2008)
- Berthold Schoene, *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007)
- Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- Nick Bentley (ed.), *British Fiction of the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 2005)
- Nick Rennison, *Contemporary British Novelists* (New York: Routledge, 2005)
- Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002)
- Martin Priestman (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)
- Barry Forshaw and Ian Rankin, *The Rough Guide to Crime Fiction* (London: Rough Guides, 2007)
- John Scraggs, *Crime Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2005)

**Postsecularism, the New Atheism and Literature after 9/11:**

- Andrew Tate, *Contemporary Fiction and Christianity* (London: Continuum, 2010)
- Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate, *The New Atheist Novel: Fiction, Philosophy and Polemic After 9/11* (London: Continuum, 2010)
- Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010)
- Kristiaan Versluys, *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009)
- Martin Amis, *The Second Plane: September 11, 2001-2007* (London: Vintage, 2009)
- Peter L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: The Resurgence of Religion in World Politics* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999)
- Fiona Tolan et. al, *Literature, Migration and the "War on Terror"* (New York: Routledge, 2011)
- John A. McClure, *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2007)
- Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007)
- Christopher Hitchens (ed), *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2007)

**Zadie Smith:**

- Philip Tew, *Zadie Smith* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)
- Claire Squires, *Zadie Smith's White Teeth: Continuum Contemporaries* (London: Continuum, 2002)
- Philip Tew, "Multiplicities and Hybridity" in *The Contemporary British Novel* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 150-179
- Dominic Head, "Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*: Multiculturalism for the Millennium" in Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew (eds), *Contemporary British Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), pp. 106-119
- Elaine Childs, "Insular Utopias and Religious Neuroses: Hybridity Anxiety in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*," *Proteus: A Journal of Ideas* 23 (1) (2006): 7-12
- Laura Moss, "The Politics of Everyday Hybridity: Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*," *Wasafiri: The Transnational Journal of International Writing* 39 (2003): 11-17
- Molly Thompson, "'Happy Multicultural Land'? The Implications of an 'Excess of Belonging' in

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*" in Kadija Sesay (ed), *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature* (Hertford, England: Hansib, 2005), pp. 122-140

Petra Tournay, "Challenging Shakespeare: Strategies of Writing Back in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Caryl Phillips' *The Nature of Blood*" in Susana Onega and Christian Gutleben (eds), *Refracting the Canon in Contemporary British Literature and Film* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 207-229

### **David Mitchell:**

Sarah Dillon (ed), *David Mitchell: Critical Essays* (Canterbury: Gylphi, 2011)

Berthold Schoene, "The World begins its turn with you, or how David Mitchell's novels think" in *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 97-124

Baryon Tensor Posadas, "Remediations of 'Japan' in *number9dream*" in Sarah Dillon (ed), *David Mitchell: Critical Essays* (Canterbury: Gylphi, 2011)

### **Kazuo Ishiguro:**

Sean Matthews and Sebastian Groes (eds), *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Continuum, 2010)

Matthew Beedham, *The Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

Barry Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000)

Wai-chew Sim, *Kazuo Ishiguro: A Routledge Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2009)

Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong (eds), *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* (Jackson, Mississippi, University Press of Mississippi, 2008)

Brian W. Shaffer, *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008)

Cynthia F. Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2004)

### **Ali Smith:**

Isobel Murray, *Scottish Writers Talking, Vol. 3* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2006)

Mark Currie, "Fictional Knowledge" in *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 107-136

Emma E. Smith, "A Democracy of Voice'? Narrating Community in Ali Smith's *Hotel World*," *Contemporary Women's Writing* 4 (2) (2010): 81-99

Kirsty Williams, "A Different Kind of Natural': The Fiction of Jackie Kay and Ali Smith" in James McGonigal and Kirsten Stirling (eds), *Ethically Speaking: Voice and Values in Modern Scottish Writing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 157-178

### **Philip Pullman:**

Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate, "Philip Pullman's Republic of Heaven" in *The New Atheist Novel: Fiction, Philosophy and Polemic After 9/11* (London: Continuum, 2010)

Margaret Speaker-Yuan, *Philip Pullman* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2006)

Claire Squires, *Philip Pullman, Master Storyteller: A Guide to the Worlds of His Dark Materials* (London: Continuum, 2007)

Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott (eds), *His Dark Materials Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005)

Nicholas Tucker, *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman* (London: Wizard Books, 2003)

Peter Vere and Sandra Miesel, *Pied Piper of Atheism: Philip Pullman and Children's Fantasy* (Ignatius Press, 2007)

### **Ian McEwan:**

Ian McEwan, "End of the World Blues" (2007) in Christopher Hitchens (ed), *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2007), pp. 351-365

Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate, "Ian McEwan's End of the World Blues" in *The New Atheist*

*Novel: Fiction, Philosophy and Polemic After 9/11* (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 16-35  
Sebastian Groes, *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Continuum, 2009)  
Julie Ellam, *Ian McEwan's Atonement* (London: Continuum, 2009)  
Peter Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)  
Dominic Head, *Ian McEwan* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007)  
Lynn Wells, *Ian McEwan* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)  
Ryan Roberts, *Conversations with Ian McEwan* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2010)  
Bruno M. Shah, "The Sin of Ian McEwan's Fictive Atonement: Reading his Later Novels," *New Blackfriars* 90 (2009): 38-49

### **Jeanette Winterson:**

Sonya Andermahr, *Jeanette Winterson: A Contemporary Critical Guide* (London: Continuum, 2007)  
Susana Onega, *Jeanette Winterson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006)  
Merja Makinen, *The Novels of Jeanette Winterson* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)  
Helena Grice and Tim Woods (eds), *I'm telling you stories': Jeanette Winterson and the Politics of Reading* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998)  
Jeanette Winterson, *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery* (London: Vintage, 2010)  
Margaret J.-M. Sönmez and Mine Özyurt Kılıç (eds), *Winterson Narrating Time and Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009)

### **David Peace:**

Matthew Hart, "An Interview with David Peace," *Contemporary Literature* 47 (4) (2006): 546-569  
Matthew Hart, "The Third English Civil War: David Peace's "Occult History" of Thatcherism," *Contemporary Literature* 49 (4) (2008): 573-596  
Lee Horsley, "From Sherlock Holmes to the Present" in Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (eds), *A Companion to Crime Fiction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 28-42  
Nicola Upson, "Hunting the Yorkshire Ripper," *New Statesman*, 20 August 2001 (accessed 31 January 2011): <http://www.newstatesman.com/200108200036>  
Terry Eagleton, "At the Coalface: Review of David Peace's *GB84*," *Guardian*, 6 March 2004 (accessed 31 January 2011): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/mar/06/featuresreviews.guardianreview20>  
Andy Beckett, "Political Gothic," *London Review of Books* 26 (18) (2004): 25-26

### **China Miéville:**

Carl Freedman, "To The Perdido Street Station: The Representation of Revolution in China Miéville's *Iron Council*" in Donald M. Hassler and Clyde Wilcox (eds), *New Boundaries in Political Science Fiction* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), pp. 259-271  
Henry Farrell, "Socialist Surrealism: China Miéville's New Crobuzon Novels" in Donald M. Hassler and Clyde Wilcox (eds), *New Boundaries in Political Science Fiction* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), pp. 272-289  
China Miéville, "Cognition as Ideology: A Dialectic of SF Theory" in Mark Bould and China Miéville (eds), *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 2009), pp. 231-248  
Mark Bould, "China Miéville" in *Fifty Key Figures in Science Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 157-160  
M. Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas, "China Miéville" in *The Science Fiction Handbook* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 163-164  
Ann VanderMeer and Jeff VanderMeer (eds), *The New Weird* (San Francisco: Tachyon Publications, 2008)  
China Miéville, "Weird Fiction" in Mark Bould (ed), *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 510-516