

现 代
英国文学简介

**A Brief
Introduction
To Modern
English
Literature**

By Elisabeth B. Booz

A Brief Introduction To Modern English Literature

1914—1980

(Lectures 1—30)

Lectures and Notes by Elisabeth B. Booz
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A Brief Introduction To
Modern English Literature

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出版说明

《现代英国文学简介》英文版系曾在我国云南大学外语系讲学的美国专家 Elisabeth B. Booz 所编写,原为讲稿,出版前由作者作了仔细的校订。

全书共三十讲,讲述的是1914年至1980年间的英国文学,着重介绍其重要流派及代表作家与作品,收集的资料比较丰富而阐述则简明扼要,可作为学习英国文学的入门教材。

此书出版前虽几经讲授并被认为适合于我国学生之知识需要与外语水平,我社仍真挚希望读者在教学和科研工作中就内容与观点多作分析,提供意见,以便修订。

A Brief Introduction To Modern English Literature

1914—1980

Lecture 1 1

The Effects of the First World War: "A New Age in English Literature"

The end of social stability and England's world-wide supremacy; disillusionment and the emergence of vigorous, experimental, highly individualistic literature. The 1920's: freedom for Ireland and the decline of the British Empire. The 1930's: depression and preparation for war. The flight of English writers to America. A brief introduction to English writers between the two world wars.

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Three Poets of the First World War —

Rupert Brooke: leader of the Georgian poets

Wilfred Owen: spokesman for a doomed generation

Siegfried Sassoon: bitter satirist against war

Explanation of the Poems

Reading: Brooke—"The Soldier"

Owen—"Anthem for Doomed Youth"

Sassoon—"Dreamers"

"Base Details"

"The General"

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"Aedh Tells of the Rose in His Heart"

"The Second Coming"

"Under Ben Bulbin" parts 5 and 6

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D. H. Lawrence: innovator of psychological fiction

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Evelyn Waugh: cynical satirist

Waugh's life, his social origins, his point of view, style and influence. His major works.

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Aldous Huxley: satirist and visionary

Huxley's life, his background and range of interest, his changing point of view, his style. His major works.

Reading: Excerpt from "Canned Fish"

Lecture 11 111

Graham Greene: analyst of character

Greene's life, types of literary production, point of view and style. His major works.

Reading: "Across The Bridge" (short story)

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W. Somerset Maugham: a master story-teller

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Reading: "The Verger" (short story)

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Three Political Poets of the 1930's —

W. H. Auden: illuminator of troubled times

Stephen Spender: personal viewer of a wasteland

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Spender—"The Prisoners"

Day Lewis—"Nearing Again the Legendary Isle"

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Three Important Poets of Scotland, Ireland and

Wales —

Hugh MacDiarmid: leader of Scottish Literary Revival

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English Drama Between the Two World Wars

T.S. Eliot and the Revival of Verse - drama

Irish drama and trends in the 1920’s. The revival of verse-drama in the 1930’s.

Reading: Excerpts from “Murder In The Cathedral”

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The Effects of the Second World War on English Literature

The break-up of the old order in England; the end of the British Empire, a new social class system. The literature reflects a new age of anger, dislocation and despair. Introduction to the principal post-war writers.

Lecture 17 182

George Orwell: disillusioned prophet

Orwell’s role in the transition to post-war England. His life, his point of view and political thought, his style and influence. His major works.

Reading: “Some Thoughts on the Common Toad” (condensed)

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Samuel Beckett: comic writer of absurdity and existentialist

despair

Beckett's life in Ireland and France, his point of view, philosophy, style and influence.

Reading: Excerpts from "Waiting For Godot"

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Two Poets of the 1950's —

Philip Larkin: foremost poet of "The Movement"

Donald Davie: poet and theorist of "The Movement"

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Kingsley Amis: first novelist of the **Angry Young Men**

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Lecture 21 243

The Angry Young Playwrights —

John Osborne: inventor of "kitchen sink" drama

Arnold Wesker: writer of plays from a socialist, Jewish point of view

Reading: Osborne—Excerpts from "The Entertainer"

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Alan Sillitoe: a proletarian writer

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William Golding: master of symbolism

Golding's life, his style and point of view, his literary antecedents and message for the future. His major works.

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Lecture 24 291

C. P. Snow: the life and theory of Two Cultures

Snow's double life as a novelist and physicist, his literary production and his point of view.

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Lecture 25 305

Two Novelists of Modern Character —

Iris Murdoch: Irish writer of intricate philosophical novels

Muriel Spark: Scottish poet, critic, novelist

Reading: Spark — Excerpts from "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie"

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Two Poets of the 1960's —

Ted Hughes: strong, subtle poet of primitive forces

Thom Gunn: bridge between English and American poetry

Explanation of the Poems

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Gunn—"Moly"

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Doris Lessing: sensitive writer on African subjects and feminism in Western culture

Lessing's life on two continents, her political and social point of view, her literary development and her major works.

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Lecture 28 344

Modern Literature in South Africa

Nadine Gordimer: subtle explorer of tangled race relations in South Africa

Gordimer's position in South Africa and in English literature, her life, her style and point of view. Her major works.

Reading: Excerpts from "July's People"

Lecture 29 361

Modern New Zealand Literature

Katherine Mansfield: New Zealand's most famous literary figure and master of the modern short story

Janet Frame: contemporary novelist and short story writer

Reading: Frame—"The Reservoir" (condensed)

Lecture 30 377

Modern Australian Literature

Patrick White: Australia's greatest novelist

White's life, his subjects, his style and point of view. His major works.

Reading: Excerpts from "The Cockatoos"

Lecture 1

THE EFFECTS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR: A NEW AGE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

This course, "A Brief Introduction To Modern English Literature", will include English literature in a broad sense: meaning not only writings from England but from the whole of the British Isles — England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. In addition, one lecture apiece will be devoted to the English Literature of South Africa and Australia.

The First World War (1914 – 1918) is an appropriate starting point for a study of modern English literature. This war had a shattering effect on English history, which was inevitably reflected in the whole intellectual life, and particularly the literature of the nation. Nobody, in 1914, was prepared for this first modern war in which England lost a whole generation of its most promising young men. Even today, many people in England blame its decline on this great loss.

At the start of the First World War, England was still the most powerful nation in the world, although its industrial supremacy and its control of the world's oceans were being threatened for the first time by Germany. Almost a quarter of the world belonged to the British Empire. England had enjoyed a hundred years of peace at home, while all its wars were fought overseas to enlarge and strengthen its empire.

Throughout most of the 19th Century, Queen Victoria reigned over a confident, stable society with a firm class structure. The economic, political and intellectual life of the nation was dominated by the upper and upper-middle classes, but the middle class as a whole grew steadily stronger. It was a period of great literary output, in which Romanticism was by far the strongest and most long-lasting movement. Although many changes and developments took place in England, the whole period became known as the Victorian Age.

This came to an abrupt end with the First World War. England's confidence was shaken, never to be restored. Its best youth was dead. The population was disillusioned by war, distrustful of its leaders and dissatisfied with the shape of its society. Ireland, after centuries of oppression by England, finally broke free as an independent nation in 1922, thus ending the unity of the British Isles. At the same time, movements for independence in the colonies foreshadowed the break-up of the British Empire. The most notable of these was the movement led by Gandhi in India, England's most important and valuable colony. Thus began England's downward slide towards the Second World War (1939 – 1945) in which it was finally destroyed as a great world power.

The shock of the First World War and the startling changes that it brought to English people's lives none the less encouraged an outburst of great literature. English writing after the war brought new experiments in form, style and content which exerted an influence on all subsequent literature in the 20th Century.

In America, the First World War was followed by a decade of prosperity (the 1920's), then, in a sudden reversal, by a decade of poverty, depression and social upheaval (the 1930's). No such dramatic times occurred in England. There, the two decades were not divided. There, the whole period between the two world wars was simply one of steadily worsening conditions, made more severe in the 1930's by the spreading effects of the American depression and the rise of Fascism in Europe. Consequently, English writing and literary criticism did not suddenly change its character, as happened in America. Rather, England's post-war literature continued to build on the works produced in its initial burst of energy, and the period 1919 – 1939 can be considered as one piece.

The end of the Victorian Age meant that old traditions, people's habits and ways of thinking, all had to undergo radical changes. Looking back at the Victorian Age from our own times, we can see its strong points and its greatness: peace and stability; immense industrial progress; huge advances in science and philosophy; a splendid body of literature. However, in 1920, England's intellectuals could only see the drawbacks and short-comings of their recent past: a rigid

and snobbish class structure; a hypocritical and prudish public morality; dishonesty disguised beneath "respectability"; cultural life befogged by the cloudy imprecision of romanticism. The writers of the 1920's devoted their efforts to stamping out all the remnants of Victorian thought and morality.

In fact, the Victorian middle class culture had already been severely criticised as early as in the 1890's, by such writers as Oscar Wilde. By the end of the 19th Century, England had developed three distinct levels of culture. New education laws which provided compulsory elementary schooling for the masses resulted in a lower class population who could read but who had a low level of culture. They liked to read easy adventure stories and sensational journalism. This level of culture was called "lowbrow". At the other extreme, serious artists and writers produced works which were only appreciated and discussed by well-educated intellectuals. This level of culture was called "highbrow". Between these two extremes, a big, average "middlebrow" culture favored art and literature which was sentimental, artificial and pious, which ignored the harsh aspects of reality, and which reinforced the middle class's own feelings of superiority. After the First World War swept away the secure, serene life of the Victorian Age, the new writers determined to create a new kind of literature.

Some great writers of the early 20th Century had already paved the way. The pessimistic realism of Thomas Hardy (1840 – 1928) made him in many ways the father of modern English literature. George Bernard Shaw, the socialist Irish playwright, (1856 – 1950), had pressed for social change and the rights of women. Joseph Conrad (1857 – 1924) disagreed with the moral ideas of good and evil which were commonly held to be true in Victorian times. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844 – 1887) had used radically experimental techniques of language and rhythm in his poetry, which was never published in his own lifetime. When his poems appeared in 1918, they seemed extremely modern. The writers mentioned above will not be studied in this course, as their most important works were written before the First World War. Others who wrote both before and after the war did some of their most important works during the 1920's and they will be studied as part of the post-war literary scene,

notably William Butler Yeats and E. M. Forster.

The principal writers of the 1920's paid little attention to reforming the structure of English society. Instead, they turned inward to study the human mind and the individual's response to modern life. They wanted to create a new type of realism, to overcome the influence of romanticism by showing the truth of people's thoughts and feelings. Even those writers who produced social satires were more concerned with the emptiness and lack of morality in individuals than with social reform. As there was no sharp break between the decades of the twenties and thirties, a younger group of politically inclined writers, especially poets, grew up among them. These young left-wing intellectuals, who had only been children at the time of the First World War, drew serious attention in the 1930's by writing about Fascism, the danger to western civilization, and the break-down of capitalist governments which could neither overcome depression nor resist Hitler.

The emphatic break with Victorian standards of literature was first clearly shown during the years of the First World War itself. At the beginning, young poets like *Rupert Brooke* went to war with enthusiasm, still holding Victorian attitudes and ideals, to fight for the glory of England. Three years later, young poets like *Wilfred Owen* and *Siegfried Sassoon* felt only horror and pity for the waste of life, and hatred of the old generation who encouraged war. They wrote vigorously honest anti-war poetry. But nearly all of England's promising young poets were killed in the war.

The greatest poet of the modern era was the Irishman, *William Butler Yeats*. Together with the American poet *Ezra Pound* and *T. S. Eliot* (who was born American but took British citizenship in 1927) these three led a revolution in the techniques of modern poetry, which has prevailed to the present time. In different ways, they revolted against the imprecise language and sentimental emotions of the earlier romantic poets. Yeats and Eliot both received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

During and after the First World War, a group of influential intellectuals lived around Bloomsbury Square, a street in London. Known as the Bloomsbury Group, they included writers, critics, philosophers and economists. Their best-known members were *Virginia Woolf* and *E. M. Forster*. They discussed many questions

concerning esthetics, style and exactitude in literature and, since the Group was considered to contain the most serious thinkers of the time, their writings were read with much interest.

But the writer who produced the most astonishing innovations, and whose influence has pervaded 20th Century literature the most deeply, was *James Joyce*. This Irishman, who lived alone in exile, recast the English language into previously unknown forms, and definitively established "stream of consciousness" as a valid way of writing fiction. His last books are so complex that they are very difficult to read. Another very original writer was *D. H. Lawrence*, who changed the traditional ways of thinking and feeling about human relationships. Both Joyce and Lawrence caused an uproar of opposition during their lives, but today their books are recognized as some of the best literature of this century.

Two authors who wrote savage satires about post-war life in England were *Evelyn Waugh* and *Aldous Huxley*. Their books were well received by the very society they criticized because they were written in a sophisticated, very amusing style. Both of these writers continued to write books until the 1960's, but their later lives took them in different directions.

Two of the most widely read authors, during long careers, were *W. Somerset Maugham* and *Graham Greene*: Maugham wrote a great many novels and short stories, of uneven quality. He considered himself to be "the best of the second-rate authors", and nowadays literary critics agree with him. His best works are excellent, and he is worth studying because his books represent the mood of his time, and so many of them have been translated into foreign languages. Graham Greene's place in 20th Century literature is not yet settled, but his novels about contemporary characters continue to be extremely popular.

In the 1930's, as Fascism and economic depression spread in Europe, political opinion in England tended toward the extremes of the right and left wings. An outstanding group of young socialist poets wrote brilliantly on political and social subjects, for they could clearly see the dangers of Fascism and the possibility of a Second World War. The best poet of this period was unquestionably *W.H. Auden*, but his fellow poets *Stephen Spender* and *C.Day Lewis* also continue to

enjoy a high reputation. Poets from other parts of the British Isles were also producing important poetry. The Irish poet *Louis MacNiece*, who wrote on subjects similar to Auden, is now considered to be second only to Auden in the quality of his poetry. *Dylan Thomas*, a Welsh poet, wrote passionately lively poetry about his own life and homeland. The most important Scottish poet of the post-war period, *Hugh MacDiarmid*, brought about a revival of Scottish literature and language, so that he is often compared with Scotland's great poet, Robert Burns (1759–1796).

Throughout its history, England has had great dramatists, for English people are keen theatregoers. In the early 20th Century, Irish playwrights dominated the scene, the greatest of whom was George Bernard Shaw. In the 1930's, *T. S. Eliot* began to write “verse-dramas” (plays written in poetry), a theatrical form which had not been in vogue since the 17th Century. Other poet-playwrights joined his movement and some beautiful, unusual plays were produced.

As the Second World War drew nearer and Fascism appeared to be gaining power as a political system in Europe, many English writers and intellectuals took refuge in America. All the authors above whose names are in italics will be discussed in the following fourteen lectures, and examples of their work will be studied.