

Gestaltung einer Sitzung
„Multicultural Britain in Literature and Film“

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Das Seminar ist als literaturwissenschaftliches Proseminar für StudentInnen konzipiert, die kein Vorwissen über postcolonial theory haben. Im folgenden stelle ich die Gestaltung der ersten Sitzung vor; vorgeschaltet sind Seminarbeschreibung und Semesterübersicht, damit man sich das Ganze besser vorstellen kann.

Course description

The population of Great Britain is more culturally diverse today than it ever was before. Experiences of migration and issues connected with life in a multicultural environment are significant factors in many people's biographies. It may hardly be surprising, then, that the past two decades have seen a proliferation of widely noticed and critically acclaimed literary works grappling with these developments.

In this seminar, we will look at some selected examples of novels and films centring on migration and life in a multicultural Britain. Special attention will be paid to the analysis of the diverse narrative and filmic strategies that are employed in order to deal with questions of personal and collective identity. We will also discuss central concepts of postcolonial theory such as "alterity" and "hybridity" in order to see how far they are helpful for our understanding of the texts/films.

Literature: Hanif Kureishi *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990); Zadie Smith *White Teeth* (2000); films: *My Son the Fanatic* (1997); *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002). Further texts will be made available during the course of the semester.

Syllabus

Date Topic

- 20.4.** Introduction
- 27.4.** Britain's "multicultural" society and "Black British literature"
- 4.5.** No class
- 11.5.** Concepts from postcolonial theory: orientalism, hybrid identities
- 18.5.** Hanif Kureishi: *The Buddha of Suburbia*
- 25.5.** Hanif Kureishi: *The Buddha of Suburbia*
- 1.6.** PENTECOST
- 8.6.** Zadie Smith: *White Teeth*
- 15.6.** Zadie Smith: *White Teeth*
- 22.6.** Zadie Smith: *White Teeth*
- 29.6.** Film analysis: preparation
- 6.7.** *Bend it Like Beckham*
- 13.7.** *My Son the Fanatic* **or** *East is East*
- 20.7.** Final Session

Erste Sitzung:

Überlegung: Einstieg in das Thema bieten; am liebsten anhand eines literarischen Textes
Zeitraum: 45 min (die erste Hälfte der Sitzung wurde auf Vorstellung der Teilnehmer sowie Klärung von organisatorischen Fragen verwendet)

Ausgeteilt wird: Handout mit den ersten 3 Strophen von Rudyard Kiplings Gedicht „The White Man’s Burden“ sowie drei Arbeitsfragen:

Rudyard Kipling: The White Man’s Burden (1899)

Take up the White Man’s burden—
Send forth the best ye breed—
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives’ need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

Take up the White Man’s burden—
In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain
To seek another’s profit,
And work another’s gain.

Take up the White Man’s burden—
The savage wars of peace—
Fill full the mouth of Famine
And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
The end for others sought,
Watch sloth and heathen Folly
Bring all your hopes to naught.

[...]

Please answer the following questions:

- Who is addressed?
- What is the burden?
- Which characteristics and roles are assigned to the two sides?

→ a very brief introduction of Kipling and the background against which the poem was written (context of the Spanish-American war which ended in the US “winning” the Philippines)

→ die Studis bekommen ca. 10 Minuten, um das Gedicht zu lesen und die drei Fragen mit ihrem Sitznachbarn zu besprechen.

→ Die Fragen werden der Reihe nach besprochen; die beiden ersten dienen dazu, das Thema des Gedichtes zu klären. Für die dritte Frage wird auf Zuruf der Studierenden ein Tafelbild erstellt, das die beiden Seiten einander gegenüberstellt. Dabei wird immer wieder dazu ermutigt, genau zu schauen, wo die entsprechenden Eigenschaften/Rollen im Gedicht tatsächlich genannt werden. Zu jedem Eintrag auf einer der Seiten wird das entsprechende Pendant für die andere Seite gesucht und ergänzt

White man	Black (?) man
you	they
Parent/teacher	child
Christian	heathen

civilized	wild
Educated, intelligent	simple
Hard-working	lazy

... and so on.

When the binary structure has been developed and discussed, it may also be interesting to point to some chiasmic/oxymoronic structures that complicate the rhetoric of the poem:

e.g. “serve your captives' need”, line 4

“savage wars of peace”, line 18 → who is savage now? Somewhat surprisingly, the roles seem to be reversed

To round up the session, I posed the question

WHY TALK ABOUT THIS POEM IN A CLASS ON CONTEMPORARY MULTICULT. LIT.?

The students came up with quite a few very interesting and pertinent points; the ones I found most important (I had thought of some points beforehand and added one to their comments that had not been mentioned):

- Poem represents a racist rhetoric that is still pervasive today
- It offers a striking example of binary thinking (white and black; each is associated with certain characteristics)
- The way in which it presents the relations between the two show that the roles are interdependent: identity of one implies that of the other, complementary roles (saying s.th. about the other is also saying something about oneself)
- The poem prompts us to consider the historical dimension of the situation of “multiculturalism” today: long and often violent history of colonial encounters, of domination and exploitation

COMMENT: I thought this worked extremely well for the first session. Many issues that will come up again during the semester were touched upon. The poem offers an extreme and thus very illustrative version of binary logic and racist rhetoric (even if we choose to read it as satirical), but also already points to some of the contradictions inherent in the view it seeks to promote. Also, the short form of the poem allowed us to try our hand at a first literary analysis without the need to prepare a text beforehand. The interval of discussing the question with their neighbours was also helpful because it helped to activate the students after a longish period of “Frontalunterricht”, in which I presented the organizational details for the course.