



BRITISH LITERATURE AFTER WW II

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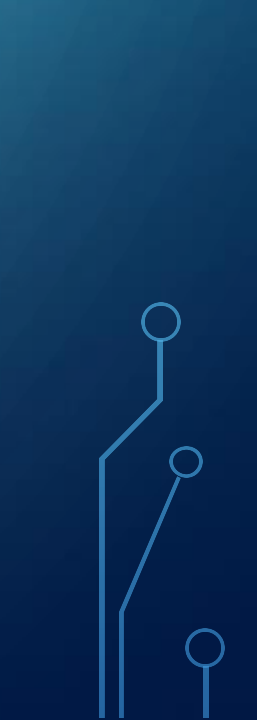
- World War II ended in 1945 and its conclusion marked an important shift in Great Britain's global role. For the first time, Britain was a secondary imperial power, something that was painful for many British citizens. The expectations after the war were that the economy would again rise, but inflation and unemployment led to an overall increase in national cynicism. Postmodernism found most of its success in America and was difficult to identify in England, as many Modernist writers continued to write well into the 1940s and 50s. Postmodernism incorporates the idea that the world is in a state of incompleteness. Postmodernists believe that there are many truths and that knowledge comes from perspective. Stemming from this is the tendency for Postmodernists to have a skeptical approach to culture, literature, and art, often leading the movement to be associated with deconstructionism. Although this approach can be found in some of the literature of the time, the writing during this period was very diverse.

POETRY

- While some poets from the Modernist period were still writing well into the 1950's and 60's, new poets also emerged. Two of these poets were **Philip Larkin** and **Ted Hughes**. One of Larkin's better-known collections of poems was ***The Whitsun Weddings*** (1964). Within this collection, his poem "**The Whitsun Weddings**" remains one of his more famous. It is one of three poems written about his train journeys. Hughes's first book of poetry, ***The Hawk in the Rain*** (1957), was dedicated to his wife, American poet Sylvia Plath. This collection featured poems about animal relationships, erotic relationships, and war stories.



- **ANGRY YOUNG MEN**

- The “angry young men” is a title applied to a group of mostly working and middle class playwrights and novelists who expressed discontent with the organization of society. The media characterized these men as those disillusioned with traditional British society. These novels and plays featured working class heroes and were successful in changing the genre
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PLAYWRIGHTS

- The name for this group came from playwright **John Osborne's** play, ***Look Back in Anger*** (1956). This play examines a marriage between a working class man, Jimmy, and his middle class wife, Alison. Their differences in class make it difficult for them to get along and when Alison becomes pregnant, their marriage falls apart. Another playwright who is considered part of this group is **Arnold Wesker**, whose **kitchen sink drama**, ***Roots*** (1959) addressed social concerns of the time. Kitchen sink dramas typically depicted the living conditions of working class Britons. They would often show cramped apartments, poor neighborhoods, and the political and social issues of the working class. This was a turn away from the “well-made” plays of the previous generation. *Roots* tells the story of Beatie Bryant, an uneducated working-class woman obsessed with her boyfriend. When he leaves her, she transitions into a woman who can express herself and her working-class struggles.

NOVELISTS

- Many novelists were also categorized as part of the “angry young men” group. **Kingsley Amis** often wrote novels that acted as social criticism. He is considered one of the leaders of the “angry young men” group. His first novel, ***Lucky Jim*** (1954), is probably his most famous and follows the character Jim Dixon as he becomes a lecturer at a prestigious university. Another writer who focused on the economic conditions of Great Britain is **John Braine**. His novel ***Room at the Top*** (1957) is about an ambitious young man named Joe Lampton, who uses seduction and lies to overcome his socioeconomic struggles. It is set in post-war Britain, as many novels written during this time were.

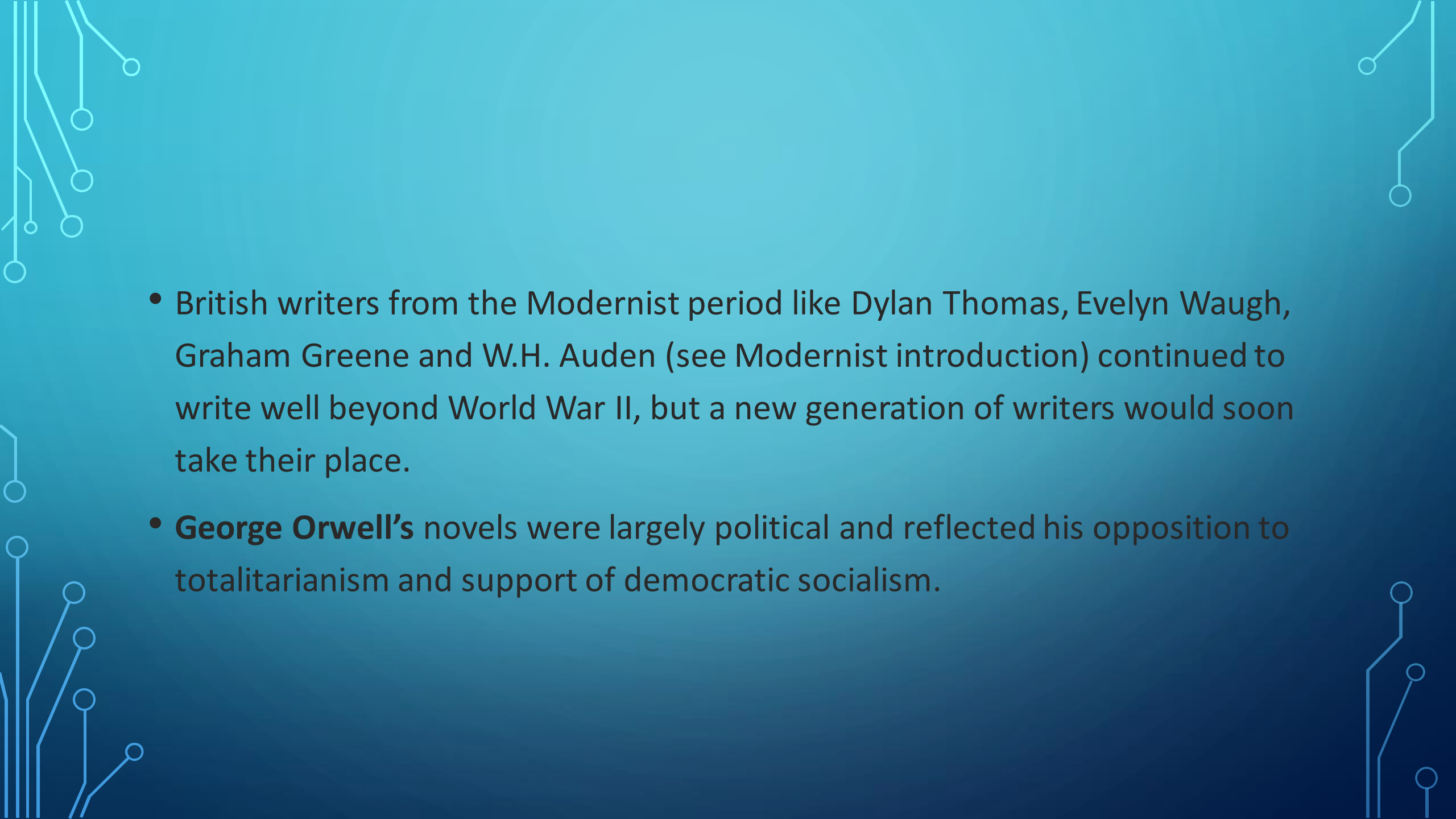
OTHER BRITISH DRAMA

- Aside from the “angry young men,” there were several playwrights finding success in post-war Britain. During this period it became more difficult to find funding for plays and only certain commercial successes were performed.
- **Harold Pinter**, who is sometimes added to the list of “angry young men,” found success with several plays including *The Birthday Party* (1958), *Tom Stoppard* (1937), and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966).

- The absurdist genre during this time focused largely on **existentialism** and the meaning of human existence. Existentialism is a philosophical theory that emphasizes the existence of the individual person as responsible for determining his or her own fate through acts of free will. **Samuel Beckett** was one of the most significant playwrights post-World War II and had a lot of influence on writers like Pinter. His play ***Waiting for Godot*** (1955) is very interesting.

RADIO DRAMA

- During the 1950s and 60s, many British playwrights began their careers by writing plays made for radio. **Caryl Churchill** started her career with radio broadcasts. Churchill often wrote about the abuses of power. Her most famous play, ***Cloud Nine*** (1979), satirizes British colonization and explores controversial topics of feminism and homosexuality. Churchill was well known for writing about sexual politics and feminist themes.

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- British writers from the Modernist period like Dylan Thomas, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene and W.H. Auden (see Modernist introduction) continued to write well beyond World War II, but a new generation of writers would soon take their place.
 - **George Orwell's** novels were largely political and reflected his opposition to totalitarianism and support of democratic socialism.

- **Magical Realism**
- One of the strongest influences of 1980's fiction was the embracing of **magical realism**, the concept in literature of accepting magic as a normal part of everyday life. Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984) was an example of this.