

# **The Roaring Twenties, Nazi Terrors and the Cold War: European Experiences reflected in Literature**

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Center for European Studies

## **The Roaring Twenties, Nazi Terrors and the Cold War: European Experiences reflected in Literature**

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### **Full course description**

LIT2002 - The Roaring Twenties, Nazi Terrors and the Cold War: European Experiences reflected in Literature

The course invites students on an exciting literary and historical journey through the grand shifts of Europe in the 20th century: from Great Britain's crumbling class systems at the turn of the centuries to the French trenches of WWI and from there to the reactionary 'roaring' twenties, the rise of fascism and Hitler's claim to power in 1933, resulting in the horrors of the Holocaust. The course will culminate at the shallows of the Cold War period, with its absurdities and the shadows of the past still lingering.

The chosen texts for this class provide a trident of literary historical accounts: autobiographical, fictional, and historiographical. That is to say: reflecting on experiences, reflecting on imagined experiences, and reflecting on the way people reflect. Put together, these texts portray the realities and long-lasting effects of historical events over the course of 60 years.

During the first few weeks we'll get a sense of what the landscape of a fast-changing early-century Europe looked like: politically, culturally, but also physically. With that as a jumping-off point, we'll be moving on to the havoc wreaked by WWI, and how it changed the aforementioned 'landscapes'—for the civilians involved, the soldiers conscripted, and for the insider-outsider American expatriate community, most famously of Paris.

During our discussions of WWII and the Shoa we will be focussing on the histories that have remained and the histories that have been lost since the war. This discussed through the lens of those who documented (in the form of diaries), those who retold the stories as second-generation survivors, and those who didn't have access to the stories of the horrors of the war, and therefore had to fill in the blanks themselves.

The last chapter of the class discussion will be devoted to the aftermath of Nazi terrors and the contradictions of living under Cold War conditions.

The class is committed to an open, informal but passionate discussion based on the reading of texts, watching movies and an excursion to sites connected with the topics of this seminar. During the seminars, students will be encouraged to engage with the texts from a critical point of view: for example, what does a feminist reading of WWI literature look like? How do we de-colonialise our understanding of the Roaring Twenties? What histories have still gone untold in our existing Holocaust-literature canon?

The class comes with a day-long academic field trip (specifics to be announced) that will give students the chance to experience some of the topics discussed in class.

Disclaimer: trips and visits related to the course are conditional. E.g. Dutch travel advice should be positive regarding the region that will be visited and institutions should be able to accept visitors. In case a proposed trip or visit cannot continue due to circumstances, alternatives may be organized.

This course consists of 32 class hours divided over 7-8 weeks. Students earn 6 ECTS credits when they obtain a passing grade. Students who need more credits can sign up for the extended course format, which includes an Independent Study Project (ISP) worth an additional 3 ECTS. The maximum number of credits that can be obtained is 9 ECTS.

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## **Course objectives**

The aim of the course is to:

Give students a thorough insight into European history, culture and experiences, from the 1920<sup>s</sup> until the beginning of the 1980<sup>s</sup>.

Acquaint students with artistic movements, philosophical and cultural ideas as well as with techniques of depicting reality in literary texts.

Students will learn about methods of literary criticism and get experience in analyzing fictional texts, with or without biographical contents.

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## **Prerequisites**

General interest in literature and European Studies.

A minimum of 7 students is needed for the course to take place.

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## **Recommended reading**

All books and texts will be available at the CES on loan. Students will read (parts of) the following books:

E.M. Forster, *Howards End*

Helen Zenna Smith, Not So Quiet  
William March, Company K  
Sylvia Beach, Shakespeare & Company  
Philippe Soupault, Last Nights of Paris  
Ernest Hemingway, A Movable Feast  
Christopher Isherwood, Goodbye to Berlin  
Collected WWII diary excerpts  
Art Spiegelman, Maus  
Jonathan Safran Foer, Everything is Illuminated  
Christa Wolf, They Divided the Sky

The following movies will be shown / are recommended as extra material:

Testament of Youth (2014)  
Joyeux Noël (2005)  
Cabaret (1972) [in-class]  
Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964)  
Goodbye, Lenin! (2003) [in-class]

# LIT2002

Period 1

**2 Sep 2024 - 25 Oct 2024** Period 4

**3 Feb 2025 - 4 Apr 2025**

ECTS credits:

**6.0**

Instruction language:

**English**

Teaching methods:

**Assignment(s), Lecture(s), Presentation(s), Paper(s)**

Assessment methods:

**Final paper, Assignment, Participation, Presentation, Attendance**

Keywords:

**Twentieth century European history ■ Literature ■ Literary analysis**