

## **History 600-008: Advanced Seminar in History**

### **Fiction and Power in Modern Europe**

Fall 2012, T 1:20-3:20, Humanities 5255

Prof. Koshar: Office Hours, Humanities 4101, R 2-3:45 & by appt.

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**Rationale:** This course discusses “political fiction” in twentieth-century Europe. Although there was a long and illustrious tradition of politically oriented fiction in Europe before 1900, such literary invention took on new poignancy with the coming of the world wars, the Communist revolution, the rise of fascism, the Holocaust, the Cold War, and the bitter social and economic conflicts of the late modern era. Stuart Scheingold argues that both European and American novels of the time evinced a stronger sense of “political estrangement” than earlier fiction had. We’ll use that argument to orient our discussion. But there are many other questions. What exactly qualifies as political fiction? It is often said that historians explain how and why historical events occurred whereas fiction writers evoke how history felt. Can the novelist tell us how something called “political” felt at specific moments in the past? If so, then how is that done? And by what criteria do we measure success or failure? Yet other questions follow. Is the work of fiction mainly a primary source for historians—and therefore studied for the way it reflects its time? Or can it also help us to “re-imagine” history? In other words, can it offer alternative historical narratives—in this case, alternative political narratives—that are legitimate in their own right? In considering such issues, our reading will include classic novels such as George Orwell’s *1984* as well as lesser-known works (to English-speaking audiences) like Heinrich Böll’s *The Train was on Time* and Ismail Kadaré’s *The General of the Dead Army*. We cast our net broadly, including German, British, Italian, French, and Albanian literature.

**Requirements and Grading:** Beside weekly readings and discussion, seminar requirements include a short, in-class research presentation and a research paper of roughly 15-18 pages. This paper may include discussion of one or several of the novels already covered in the course. Or students may choose to write on a novel or novels we haven’t considered. We’ll discuss the research projects at length in the course of the semester. Roughly half your grade is based on participation (including sessions in which several students will serve as “lead discussants”) and the in-class presentation; the other half is based on the final paper.

### **Required Reading:**

Stuart A. Scheingold, *The Political Novel: Re-Imagining the Twentieth Century* (2010)

Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire: The Story of a Squad* (1916)

Ignazio Silone, *Bread and Wine* (1936)

George Orwell, *1984* (1949)

Heinrich Böll, *The Train Was on Time* (1949)

Bernhard Schlink, *The Reader* (1995)

Ismail Kadaré, *The General of the Dead Army* (1963)

Christa Wolf, *The Quest for Christa T.* (1968)

Albert Cossery, *Proud Beggars* (1955)

Ian McEwen, *Saturday* (2005)

### **Optional Background Reading on Learn@UW Course Site**

- Cheryl Dueck, *Rifts in Time and the Self: The Female Subject in Two Generations of East German Women Writers* (2004), 19-46.
- Jean-François Fourney, "Laziness and Technology according to a Storyteller of Cairo," *Yale French Studies* 82, 1 (1993): 158-71.
- Irving Howe, *Politics & The Novel* (1957), 203-51.
- Eno Koço, "Shostakovich, Kadaré and the nature of dissidence: An Albanian view," *Musical Times* 146 (Spring 2005): 58-74
- Charles S. Kraszewski, "Of Whores and Heiresses: Polish Women, German Men, and Stereotypes in Heinrich Böll's 'Der Zug war pünktlich' and Krzysztof Zanussi's 'Drogi pośród nocy'," *Comparative Literature Studies* 40, 3 (2003): 286-310.
- Jeffrey Meyers, "George Orwell and the Art of Writing," *The Kenyon Review* 27, 4 (2005): 92-114.
- Arthur Marwick, "The Great War in Print and Paint: Henri Barbusse and Fernand Léger," *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, 4 (2002): 509-21.
- Brian Moloney, *Italian Novels of Peasant Crisis 1930-1950* (2005), 123-40.
- Peter Morgan, *Ismail Kadare: The Writer and the Dictatorship 1957-1990* (2010), 5-34, 63-81.
- Idem., "Ismail Kadare: Modern Homer or Albanian Dissident?" *World Literature Today* 80, 5 (2006): 7-11.
- Tom Moylan, "Anticipatory Fiction: Bread and Wine and Liberation Theology," *Modern Fiction Studies* 35, 1 (Spring 1989): 103-117.
- Grace Paley, "The Quest for Christa W.," *The Nation* (April 5, 1993): 454-57.
- Kristin Rebien, "Dimensions of Engagement: Politics and Aesthetics in Heinrich Böll's Early Fiction," *The German Quarterly* 80, 3 (2007): 350-67.
- Martin Swales, "Sex, Shame, and Guilt: Reflections on Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* (The Reader) and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," *Journal of European Studies* 33 (2003): 7-22.
- Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace, "Postcolonial Melancholia on Ian McEwan's *Saturday*," *Studies in the Novel* 39, 4 (Winter 2007): 465-80.

### **Optional Background Reading on College Library Reserve:**

- Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*
- William W. Hagen, *German History in Modern Times: Four Lives of the Nation*
- Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*
- Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*
- John Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe, Vol. 2: From the French Revolution to the Present*
- Joseph Rothschild and Nancy Wingfield, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II*
- Bernard Wasserstein, *Barbarism and Civilization: A History of Europe in Our Time*
- Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995), 178-203.

## Course Schedule

### 1. Themes and Concepts

- Sept. 4 Course Introduction  
Sept. 11 No Class: Reading Week  
Sept. 18 Twentieth Century History—as a Novel?  
Reading: Scheingold, *The Political Novel*

### 2. World War I

- Sept. 25 Solidarity in the Trenches?  
Barbusse, *Under Fire*

### 3. Leviathan-State

- Oct. 2 Communist Resistance as Twentieth Century Christianity?  
Silone, *Bread and Wine*  
Oct. 9 Was Orwell Anti-Political?  
Orwell, *1984*

### 4. War and Genocide, Made in Germany

- Oct. 16 “Being-unto-Death” and World War II  
Böll, *The Train Was on Time*  
Oct. 23 Victimizers as Victims?  
Schlink, *The Reader*

### 5. Memory and Subjectivity under Communism

- Oct. 30 Albanian Troubles with the Past  
Kadaré, *General of the Dead Army*  
Nov. 6 East German Troubles with Personality  
Wolf, *Quest for Christa T.*

### 6. Contemporary History as Western Failure

- Nov. 13 Joys of Poverty?  
Cossery, *Proud Beggars*  
Nov. 20 Emptiness of Prosperity?  
McEwen, *Saturday*

### 7. Student Research

- Nov. 27 Student Presentations  
Dec. 4 Student Presentations  
Dec. 11 Student Presentations

**Dec. 18 Papers Due by Noon**