Comparative Literature / English 148

Fiction of the Second World War

John Burt
Rabb 141 (x2158)
burt@brandeis.edu
Office hours: T 9 AM, F 1 PM and by appointment

The Second World War was the most violent conflict in history, involving many nations and being fought in many theaters of war. In Europe, North America, and in East Asia, the Second World War was the defining event of the twentieth century, with most of the political and social events of those regions reasonably being seen either as causes or consequences of the war. The Second World War changed the meaning of war, the meaning of politics, and the meaning of culture, in ways that have not yet fully been assimilated.

This course strives to see the war from many points of view. Its intention is to include fiction from most of the major combatant nations, and to pay attention to small as well as to large arenas of conflict. Although the readings in this course will be from the literatures of many nations, we will not assume that particular authors represent the views or the interests of their own nations in any straightforward way. Nations are always divided, and rarely if ever can be said to speak with one mind or to see even the most important issues in exactly the same way. But authors are also divided, with mixed feelings, mixed loyalties, and complex predicaments. Whatever art is, it is something that emerges from the turbulence of divided human minds engaging the turbulence of events, from what Faulkner called the human heart at war with itself. Some of the authors we will read experienced the war directly, either as soldiers, as refugees, or as civilians under occupation. Some of the novels were written during or soon after the war, others much later. Although I have chosen authors from many nations, I have also organized the course around different phases of the war. We cannot hope to form a complete picture of that war, but we can at least examine it from many points of view.

Texts

- Olivia Manning *The Spoilt City* (volume 2 of *The Balkan Trilogy*) ISBN: 9781590173312
- Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus* ISBN: 9780375701160
- Hans Fallada *Every Man Dies Alone* ISBN: 9781935554042

Week 1 (August 31, September 4)

**Reading**: France, 1940: Irène Némirovsky, *Suite Française*

Born to a Jewish family in Kiev in 1903, Némirovsky fled to France with her family at the beginning of the Russian Revolution. Her career as an author was established by the publication of *David Golder* in 1929. *Suite Française* was written in 1940 and 1941 as the events it describes unfolded. Némirovsky was arrested and deported to Auschwitz on July 17, 1942. Her surviving daughter kept the manuscript of *Suite Française*, but did not discover that it was a novel until much later. It was finally published in 2004.

Week 2 (September 7, 14)

**Reading**: Romania, 1940-1 (Britain): Olivia Manning *The Spoilt City*
The Spoilt City (1962) is the second novel in Manning’s six-novel series, Fortunes of War, chronicling the wanderings of a British academic couple, Harriet and Guy Pringle, as they are driven from Romania, to Greece, and to Egypt by the vicissitudes of the war. The Spoilt City is set among British academics at the University of Bucharest just after the fall of France, as Romania, loosely aligned with Britain and France in 1939, teeters on the edge of the Iron Guard coup that aligned Romania with Germany. (Students might also want to read The Great Fortune, which introduces most of the principal characters, and is set in Romania between September, 1939 and June, 1940. You might also be interested in the 1987 BBC miniseries of the whole Fortunes of War series, starring Emma Thompson and Kenneth Branagh.)

**Writing Assignment:** Commentary 1,

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**Week 3 and 4 (September 18, 21, 28, October 2)**

**Reading:** Germany, through 1945: Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus

Concluding during the war, and written during Mann’s exile in California, this novel retells the Faust story as the “biography” of Adrian Leverkühn, a composer of genius. Meant to be seen against other novels about artist-heroes such as A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man or In Search of Lost Time, it raises unanswerable questions about the meaning of modernity and the place of high art and culture in a violent world.

**Writing Assignment:** Commentary 2, Commentary 3,

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**Week 5 and 6 (October 5, 9, 12, 16)**

**Reading:** United States, 1942: James Jones, The Thin Red Line

This chaotic, disturbing 1962 novel about the battle of Guadalcanal was the second of Jones’ trilogy of war novels, a trilogy that began with From Here to Eternity (1952) and concluded with Whistle, which was left unfinished when Jones died in 1977. You should be warned that the 1998 Terrence Malick film does not follow the novel very closely, although it is a wonderful work of art in its own right.

**Writing Assignment:** Commentary 4, Commentary 5

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**Week 7, 8, 9 (October 19, 23, 26, 30, November 2,6)**

**Reading:** Soviet Union, 1942: Vassily Grossman, Life and Fate

Life and Fate is one of the handful of greatest novels of the 20th century. A gruesome, morally complicated account of the battle of Stalingrad (plus a whole lot more), by the chief reporter for Red Star. Believed to have been destroyed by the KGB in 1962, a manuscript surfaced in the United States in the 1980s. I have heard a few episodes of the BBC radio version, starring Kenneth Branagh, which is excellent.

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**Research Proposal Due October 26**

**Week 10 (November 9, 13)**

**Reading:** Japan, 1944: Shohei Ooka, Fires on the Plain

A dark 1957 novel about a Japanese soldier during the battle for Leyte who becomes separated from his formation.

**Week 11 and 12 (November 16, 20, 27, 30)**

**Reading:** Germany, 1943: Hans Fallada, Every Man Dies Alone

A relentless and remorseless account of a working class Berlin couple’s attempt to resist Nazi rule, their detection and arrest, their trial and execution.

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**Annotated Bibliography Due November 16**

**Week 13 (December 4, 7, 11 (special day of Jubilee))**

**Reading:** United States, 1945: Joseph Heller Catch-22

A classic text familiar to most of you. The manuscript and other editorial materials are held in the special collections department here at Brandeis.

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**Rough Draft due to Writing Groups December 4**
Requirements:

1. **Short papers** There will be short (two pages or so) writing assignments due every Tuesday for five weeks. You will pick a passage of about 250 words from the reading for that day or the next and type it out. Be sure to pick a passage which strikes you as rich and interesting and full of a significance that might not be already obvious to every reader of that text. In other words, I don’t want you to pick a passage that will enable you to repeat some point I have already made in the lecture, but rather some passage which will enable you to bring a new reflection into our conversation, some passage that casts some new light upon the conversation we have already been having, some light that we might not have seen were it not for you. You will write a two page (or so) commentary on that passage, giving what you take its point to be, noting its context, and developing in cogent detail the claim it leads you to make about the text. Imagine that you are writing for someone who has some knowledge of the text but who does not know what precisely is your point of view about it—someone rather like the other members of this class, for instance. I will not give particular papers letter grades, but I will comment upon them and give them either a check, a check plus, or a check minus. You are to turn the whole lot of them in again at the end of the term, and they will be the basis for your final grade. Attendance at the lectures and discussion sections is mandatory. If you miss one of either, I will expect you to explain to me why in writing at the next class.

3. **Research Paper** The principal assignment for this class will be a research paper, of 12 pages minimum, concerned with one of the texts this course will examine. To prepare this paper you will need to start with an overarching paradigm from literary study. Some overarching studies of southern literature might give you a starting point. Literary theory might provide you with paradigms to discuss issues of racial conflict, cultural conflict, colonialism, or gender and sexuality issues. You should also make yourself familiar with the critical literature on your chosen novel, which you can access using The MLA International Bibliography or JSTOR Language and Literature.

You will develop the papers in stages, which will include

- A one-page research proposal, giving your topic, developing your take, and outlining the stakes of your project, due on October 19
- An annotated bibliography, outlining what is to be learned from your key sources, due on November 9
- A conference with me, which will take place during the week of November 12
- A rough draft, which will be due to a writing group of your peers on December 4
- A completed research paper, due on December 15

Policies

1. **Disability** If you are a student with a documented disability at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see the course instructor immediately.

2. **Attendance and Participation** Attendance in this course is required. A student with more than two unexcused absences should expect to fail the course. Participation in the class discussion is required, so come to class prepared to speak. There may well be classes at Brandeis in which you can coast for much of the term and recover yourself by heroic efforts at the end, but this isn’t one of them. It’s best to plan to work steadily.

3. **Extensions** You must contact me no later than the class before a paper is due to receive an extension. I will not grant extensions on the due date of the paper. Late papers will be docked in proportion to their lateness.

4. **Academic Honesty** You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as section 5 of the Rights and Responsibilities handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student...
Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.

5. **Electronics** You are not allowed to have an open laptop in this class. Please turn off your cell phones for the duration of the class.

6. **Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week)** Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

7. **Communications** The course will have a mailing list on LATTE. Information about snow days, changed deadlines, and so forth will be broadcast on that mailing list. We may make use of LATTE discussion forums as well.

**Assignment Weights**

I view calculations using these values with suspicion, and I will not accept arguments about your final grade based on calculations from this table, but I include this table to give you a rough idea of how much each assignment is worth.

- Short Papers 20 %
- First Paper 20 %
- Second Paper 35 %
- Participation 25 %