

## LITERATURE AND FILM OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC (in English translation)

**OLLI@Berkeley, Spring 2019**

Mondays, April 1—29, 2019 (5 weeks), 10:00 a.m. — 12:30 p.m.  
University Hall 41B, Berkeley, CA 94720

In this interactive seminar we shall read and reflect on literature as well as watch and discuss films of the Weimar Republic (1919–33), one of the most creative periods in German history, following the traumatic World War I and revolutionary times. Many of the critical issues and challenges during these short 14 years are still relevant today. The Weimar Republic was not only Germany's first democracy, but also a center of cultural experimentation, producing cutting-edge art. We'll explore some of the most popular works: Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's musical play, *The Threepenny Opera*, Joseph von Sternberg's original film *The Blue Angel*, Irmgard Keun's bestseller *The Artificial Silk Girl*, Leontine Sagan's classic film *Girls in Uniform*, Erich Maria Remarque's antiwar novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, as well as compelling poetry by Else Lasker-Schüler, Gertrud Kolmar, and Mascha Kaléko.

### Format

This course will be conducted in English (films with English subtitles). Your active participation and preparation is highly encouraged! I recommend that you read the literature in preparation for our sessions. I shall provide weekly study questions, introduce (con)texts in short lectures and facilitate our discussions. You will have the opportunity to discuss the literature/films in small and large groups. We'll consider authors' biographies in the socio-historical background of their work.

A course reader (hard copy) will be provided and can be picked up after February 14 at *Instant Copying & Laser Printing*, 2138 University Ave (between Shattuck Ave. & Oxford St.), Berkeley, CA 94704 for \$28 plus tax [please call ahead; printer prefers cash and check payments].

### Recommended Reading to be completed before Session One

Bertolt Brecht. *The Threepenny Opera (Die Dreigroschenoper)*. Trans. Desmond Vesey and Eric Bentley. New York: Grove Press, 1960.

#### April 1 "Food is the first thing — morals follow on."

"Borrowing" from John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, dramatist Bertolt Brecht and composer Kurt Weill's *Dreigroschenoper (The Threepenny Opera)* became an instant success in Berlin in 1928. Set in Victorian London, it focuses—on the surface—on the criminal life of Mackie Messer (Mack the Knife). Underneath, however, it can be interpreted as a critique of capitalism and corruption. *The Threepenny Opera* is commonly regarded as the first play of the so-called epic theatre (which Brecht later called dialectical theatre). Brecht did not strive for identification of the audience with his characters but rather for critical distance, causing a *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect). Brecht and Weill fled National Socialist (Nazi) Germany in 1933.

### In-class Film Screening and Discussion in Session Two

*Der blaue Engel (The Blue Angel)*. Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Germany: Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft (UFA), 1930. 99 min. Recommended viewing of the restored English version: <https://archive.org/details/theblueangel1930>.

**April 8 “Falling in love again ... I can't help it.”**

An adaptation of Heinrich Mann's 1905 novel *Professor Unrat* (Professor Garbage), *The Blue Angel* is transposed into the Weimar Republic at the end of its “wild” years. Does sensual cabaret artist Lola Lola (Marlene Dietrich) embody the “new woman” who is responsible for the fatal fall of the once respectable *Gymnasiallehrer* (high school teacher) Professor Rath (Emil Jannings)? Does the film destabilize class and gender roles? A social critique of bourgeois hypocrisy and /or popular entertainment? *The Blue Angel* was banned by the Nazi regime in 1933.

**Recommended Reading to be completed before Session Three**

Irmgard Keun. *The Artificial Silk Girl (Das kunstseidene Mädchen)*. Trans. Kathie von Ankum. New York: Other Press, 2002.

**April 15 “I’m going to be a star, and then everything I do will be right...”**

Fired from her boring job as a typist after rejecting her employer's sexual advances in provincial Germany, Doris, the young protagonist, ventures out to the big city: Berlin. Starting a new life, she aspires to become *ein Glanz* (a glamour). Will she succeed in the “golden twenties”? This novel, published in 1932, became a bestseller right away. Did Keun sense the upcoming calamity? The Nazi regime banned her books as “asphalt literature with anti-German tendency” in 1933.

**Recommended Reading and in-class Film Screening in Session Four**

*Mädchen in Uniform (Girls in Uniform)*. Dir. Leontine Sagan. Written by Christa Winsloe.

Germany: Deutsche Film-Gemeinschaft, 1931. 98 min. (German with English subtitles).

Erich Maria Remarque. *All Quiet on the Western Front (Im Westen nichts Neues)*. Trans. A.W.

When. [Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1929] New York: Random House, 2013. Excerpt (pp. 1-102).

Richard Arthur Firda, “Chronology: Erich Maria Remarque's Life and Works” in *All Quiet on the Western Front: Literary Analysis and Cultural Context*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993; pp. xi-xiv.

**Optional film** (outside of class): *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Dir. Lewis Milestone, 1930.

**April 22 “Don't think! Obey!”**

*Girls in Uniform* is set in imperial Germany before World War I, providing glimpses into its hierarchical social and political system. Fourteen-year-old Manuela von Meinhardis (Hertha Thiele), who lost her mother at a young age, is sent to a boarding school for girls where authoritarian Prussian discipline stifles the students. Only the teacher Fräulein von Bernburg (Dorothea Wieck) shows kindness and affection toward the girls who, in turn, adore her. When Manuela publicly proclaims her feelings, a drama unfolds... Prohibited in Nazi Germany, *Mädchen in Uniform* was successful internationally, especially in Japan, USA, United Kingdom, France, and Mexico. In Germany, it is still popular as a lesbian classic.

Remarque's world best-selling novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* tells the story of Paul Bäumer, a common German soldier, and his comrades during World War I. As these young men fight and suffer in a war, which they

scarcely understand, they lose their innocence—and many their lives. Bäumer experiences how war robs soldiers of their civility and ethics. The author was himself drafted into the army in 1916 as an eighteen-year-old student. Traumatized by the memories of his time at the front, he wrote this harrowing account of modern warfare, which was published in 1929. Remarque was forced into exile and his books burnt by Nazis in 1933.

## **Recommended Reading to be completed before Session Five**

### **Primary literature:**

Else Lasker-Schüler. *"Your Diamond Dreams Cut Open My Arteries": Poems by Else Lasker-Schüler*. Trans. Robert P. Newton. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982. Pages 112-113, 127-127, 202-203. Print.

Gertrud Kolmar. *Dark Soliloquy: The Selected Poems of Gertrud Kolmar [i.e. G. Chodziesner]*. Trans. Henry A. Smith. New York: Seabury Press, 1975. Pages 54-61, 196-199. Print.

Mascha Kaléko. *"No matter where I travel, I come to Nowhereland": The Poetry of Mascha Kaléko*. Trans. Andreas Nolte. Burlington, VT: Queen City Printers, 2010. Pages 70-71, 80-81, 88-89. Print.

### **Secondary literature:**

Sigrid Bauschinger. "Else Lasker-Schüler (1869 – 1945)." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. Jewish Women's Archive. <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/lasker-schueler-else>. 3 February 2019.

Susan Cocalis, ed. *The Defiant Muse: German Feminist Poems from the Middle Ages to the Present*. New York: The Feminist Press, 1986. Print. Pages 96-101.

Ludger Heid. "Mascha Kaléko." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. Jewish Women's Archive. <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/kaleko-mascha>. 3 February 2019.

Kirsten Krick-Aigner. "Gertrud Kolmar (1894-1943)." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. Jewish Women's Archive. <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/kolmar-gertrud>. 3 February 2019.

## **April 29 "You hear me speak. But do you hear me feel?"**

Despite their prominence in Germany, Else Lasker-Schüler, Gertrud Kolmar, and Mascha Kaléko's works are not well known in the English-speaking world. All three lived in Berlin during the Weimar Republic, making a name for themselves as German poets of Jewish heritage (Kaléko as a Polish-Jewish immigrant). Whereas Lasker-Schüler and Kaléko were celebrities in the literary avant-garde, Kolmar shied away from the limelight. Lasker-Schüler and Kolmar's writings expressed their mystical love of nature and animals and reflected on Romantic and biblical traditions. Kaléko is known for her witty, satirical descriptions of ordinary people's lives in the urban environment. All three took emancipatory stances as women. The momentum of their careers was blocked dramatically in 1933 by the Nazis' racist persecution of Jews. Lasker-Schüler and Kaléko were able to flee Nazi Germany and survive in exile, but Kolmar was deported and murdered in Auschwitz in 1943.

We shall recite and discuss some of their most compelling poems (in German and English).