



1917 and the Background of the Great War

Thursdays from 1-4 on March 17, 24, 31, April 7 and 14, 2022.

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Mendes's film, released in 2019, received ten nominations at the 92nd Academy Awards, including Best Film and Best Director and three wins for Best Cinematography, Best Visual Effects and Best Sound Mixing. This course will focus on the film as a launching pad for a discussion of the Great War itself, its major themes and tropes, and the literary and artistic past echoed throughout the film.

Students should watch the entire film before the first class on March 17, 2022. The format for the course will focus on key segments of the film for points for discussion. For instance, the film begins and ends with two pastoral moments that seem to repeat one another, and yet the experience of the film's protagonist, Lance Corporal Schofield (George MacKay) reshapes the way we perceive that ending.

This course will emphasize major moments in the film such as the trench network on the Western front and No Man's Land (opening scenes after the film's pastoral beginning) in terms of not just the World War I's significance as the first modern war but also in terms of how those images continue to resonate in the contemporary psyche. The phrases "in the trenches" and No Man's Land have now lost their original meaning, but they are reminders of how unique and important the Great War was for Western Civilization, especially the war on the Western Front.

Schedule:

March 17: Trenches and No Man's Land. Significance of the Great War. Text: Paul Fussell: *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Paperback: Amazon). Preface, chapters 1-5, 7-8.

The Landscape of the Great War: Lecture on the paintings of Paul Nash (1889-1946).

March 24: The house, the farm, and the airplane. Text: Erich Maria Remarque: *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929). Highly Recommended: American film version of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. (1930).

Google: BBC: "Viewpoint: How WWI Changed Aviation for Ever."

March 31: Burning Cities. Text: T.S. Eliot: *The Waste Land*. (1922). Online.

Text: Mary Borden: *The Forbidden Zone: A Nurse's Impressions of the First World War* (1929). E. Book. Online.

Highly recommended: Helen Zenna Smith: *Not So Quiet . . . Stepdaughters of War* (1930)

April 7: The River, Renewal, and "a poor wayfaring stranger": The Poetry and Music of the Great War. A. E. Housman, William Butler Yeats, Wilfred Owen, and Isaac Rosenberg. To be assigned: Online.

April 14: Satire and the Great War: The General (Colin Firth) and the Colonel (Benedict Cumberbach).

Text: Humphrey Cobb: *Paths of Glory* (1935) and the film version of *Paths of Glory* (1957). Summing up: What WWI tells us about the future as dystopia: scenes from *Dr. Strangelove* (1967). George Kennan: The Great War is "the Seminal Catastrophe of the Twentieth Century."