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Humanities Seminars Program
Spring 2018
Between Two World Wars: Germany's Roaring 1920s



Scene from *The Blue Angel*

Germany's Weimar Republic (1919-1933) rose out of the ashes of World War I to become both the most creative and fraught periods of the twentieth century. Berlin as its exciting capital, was the place of the most radical experimentation in the visual and performing arts, in mass entertainment and theater, in literature and architecture. Berlin was viewed as a laboratory of modernity that drew people to its venues from all over the world. While the cultural stage was vibrant and intoxicating, the shell shock of World War I, the demands of the Versailles Treaty, economic instability, social upheaval and political turmoil also haunted the celebrated roaring twenties. In order to gain insight into the rich landscape of the Weimar Republic, we will explore avant-garde movements like Expressionism and Dada, Fritz Lang's monumental classic film *Metropolis*, and Bertolt Brecht's reinvention of theater and his play *Man is Man*. We will discuss the challenges Germany's fledgling democracy faced and the reasons for its failure, and consider the vast social changes, the impact of mass culture and technological developments on twentieth-century sensibilities, the changing cityscape and the emergence of the modern

woman. We will come to understand why this period, still relevant today, continues to fascinate us.

Required Reading:

Bertolt Brecht, *A Man's A Man: Early Plays* by Bertolt Brecht, edited by Eric Bentley, Grove Press, New York. Paperback. 2007.

Screening: The movie *The Blue Angel* will be screened in the Rubel on Monday, February 12, from 1 – 3:00 p.m.

The additional readings will be uploaded to a virtual site at Box@UA and the link will be shared with all registered students in mid December.


Suggested Optional Reading: *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. Edited by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

January 29 | February 5 | February 12 | February 19 | February 26

 **January 29: Introduction: From World War I to Modernity
The German Avant-gardes: Expressionism and DADA**

Readings:

Berlin: A Short History (The Roaring Twenties)
Oswald Spengler, “The Decline of the West” (1918)
Raoul Hausmann, “The German Philistine Gets Upset” (1919)
Friedrich Kroner, “Overwrought Nerves”

 **February 5: Technology, Modernity and Americanism: Weimar's Economic Prosperity**

Readings:


Rudolf Kayser, “Americanism”
Stefan Zweig, “The Monotonization of the World” (1925)
Friedrich Sieburg, “Worshipping Elevators”

 **February 12: Screening of *The Blue Angel***

 **February 19: Visual Culture and the Modern Woman**

Readings:

Vicki Baum, “People of Today”
Siegfried Kracauer, “Working Women”

 **February 26: A New Theater**

Readings:

Bertolt Brecht, *Man's A Man* (1926)
Friedrich Wolf, “Art is a Weapon” (1928)
Heinrich Hauser, “The Unemployed”
B. Traven, “Bank Failures”