

COURSE TITLE: History

Transition Activity

1. Make timelines for Germany 1918-45/West Germany 1945-89 and Italy 1911-1946
2. Read at least one of these:

Germany

The Reader by Bernhard Schlink

A teenager in 1950s West Germany begins an affair with an older woman (a 36-year-old tram conductor). The story unfolds into a reflection on war crimes and the Holocaust, guilt and punishment.

The Past Is Myself by Christabel Bielenberg (this has also been published under the title 'Christabel')

This is the memoir of Christabel Bielenberg who married a German lawyer in 1934. She lived through the war in Germany, as a German citizen, under the horrors of Nazi rule and Allied bombings. Closely associated with resistance circles, her husband was arrested after the failure of the plot against Hitler's life on 20th July 1944, and she herself was interrogated by the Gestapo.

The Lost Honour Of Katharina Blum by Heinrich Böll

This short novel deals with tabloid newspaper sensationalism and the political climate of panic over terrorism in 1970s West Germany. The main character, Katharina Blum, is an innocent housekeeper whose life is ruined by an invasive tabloid reporter and a police investigation when the man with whom she has just fallen in love turns out to be wanted by the police because of a bank robbery.

Iron Coffins: A U-boat Commander's War, 1939-45 by Herbert Werner.

One for fans of military history. Oscar Werner graduated from the German naval academy in 1941 at the age of 21. He then became a junior U-boat officer. By 1944 he was a U-boat captain and would be one of only a couple of dozen captains who survived the war as U-boats moved from being hunters to prey in the face of ever-improving Allied detection and attack techniques. This long memoir is also interesting for its descriptions of wartime Germany in his short periods of leave.

Alone In Berlin by Hans Fallada

This is a long novel about low level opposition to Nazi rule in wartime Berlin. Otto and Anna Quangel are a Berlin working couple, laborious, unsociable, thrifty to the point of stinginess, and originally not hostile to the National Socialists. That changes in 1940 when their beloved son, Ottochen, is killed while fighting in France. Otto, a foreman in a furniture factory that soon will be turned over to making coffins, is provoked into resistance.

Fans of the film 'Cabaret' might wish to read Goodbye To Berlin by Christopher Isherwood.

Italy

The Conformist by Alberto Moravia (1951)

Secrecy and silence are second nature to Marcello Clerici, the hero of *The Conformist*, a book which made Alberto Moravia one of the world's most read post-war writers. Clerici is a man who yearns for normality for reasons that go back to an incident in his childhood, but he confuses normality and conformity. In pursuit of conformity he marries to fulfil respectable society's expectations and he volunteers to work for the Fascist secret police, the OVRA. He is ordered to go to Paris to kill his former professor, now in exile, to demonstrate his loyalty to the Fascist state.

First Words : A Childhood In Fascist Italy by Rosetta Loy (1997)

Born in 1931, Loy grew up in a prosperous Catholic family in Rome, happy with her friends, her school, her orderly life. She became one of Italy's leading novelists and journalists, she looks back on the years between 1936 and 1943 to write a memoir in which she alternates between poetic memories of her privileged childhood and an embittered account of fascism in Italy, an evil to which she was then oblivious.

The Things We Used To Say by Natalia Ginzburg (1963)

This is really a biography of Ginzburg's family as seen through a novelist's eyes. Nothing spectacular happens or, when it does (the rise of fascism, the arrest of her husband by the fascist police and his fate at the hands of the Germans), it is treated in an almost matter-of-fact manner. We learn of her growing up in Sicily with a father who is dominating and controlling but for whom she clearly feels considerable affection. We see the rise of fascism, the move of the family to Turin, the anti-fascist activities of her family, her meeting with her future husband, Professor Ginzburg, and the struggles of life after Fascism.

None of these will be the subject of particular study on your course. They will all give insight into parts of German or Italian history in the period that we study.

