

Introduction: 'Europe in the 1950s: The "Lost" Decade?'

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The six papers in this special issue of *New Readings* were first presented at a conference held in Cardiff in July 2007. The conference was devoted to Europe in the 1950s and explored how such a 'forgotten decade' can be viewed as setting the foundations for contemporary Europe. Papers were presented from a variety of methodological and conceptual perspectives, from economic history to film studies, literature, historiography and popular culture. Participants came from many different countries, both within and beyond Europe's borders, and a lively exchange was evident in all sessions, contesting some of our ingrained preconceptions both of the 1950s as a decade and of the construction of post-war Europe as a cultural, historical and geo-political entity.

The articles assembled here represent some of the exciting work currently being undertaken in literary and cultural studies in Europe and the US. They investigate a range of topic areas, such as modern dance, post-war film and literature, the visual arts and the intersection of science, literature and politics. They reflect the novelty of the conference and its engagement with current debate on the 'identity crisis' of the 1950s, sandwiched between the horrors of war and the apparent permissiveness and youth culture of the 1960s. Contributions to this issue highlight how such a decade has shaped the post-war era, witnessing the development of influential literary and artistic trends that have had a profound impact on contemporary Europe. Indeed, as editors, we are impressed and pleased by the range of critical perspectives evident in the articles presented here and the attention paid to canonical figures as well as lesser known writers and artists whose work also merits detailed textual readings. From the circulation of Shakespeare's plays in translation to the influence of evolutionary biologist Lysenko on French authors, from the paintings and prose fiction of East and West German artists and writers to the cultural offensive of American dance in France during the Cold War, each article provides a compelling case for reinvestigating the 1950s as an experimental decade in many senses – aesthetically, historically and culturally.

As editors of this volume, we would like to thank Kevin Passmore, our fellow conference organiser, who was pivotal to the success of the Europe in the 1950s conference. Equally, we would like to thank the referees for their helpful comments and support for this volume. Papers on political, social and economic history from the Europe in the 1950s conference are forthcoming in the [Cardiff Historical Papers](#) series. These complementary publications showcase the diversity and intellectual quality of such a stimulating event and the academic exchange it generated.