SYLLABUS: Holocaust Literature and Film  
IDS 121.33 H, Honors Section (2:00-3:15, Tuesdays & Thursdays) 
Fall 2018  

Prof. Jonathan Druker  
e-mail: j.druker@ilstu.edu  
Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures  
Stevenson Hall 240  
Telephone: 438-7978  

Office hours: Tuesdays, 11:00-11:50, and Thursdays, 1:00-1:50, and by appointment  

IDS 121 (known as the “Texts and Contexts” rubric) is a writing intensive course in the “Language in the Humanities” category of the General Education curriculum at Illinois State University. In addition, this particular course is an Honors Section and counts as an Honors Learning Experience. Successful completion of this course, defined as earning a “C” or better, will fulfill your Honors Program participation requirement for the semester.  

Course Overview:  

Corresponding roughly with the years of the Third Reich, 1933-1945, the Holocaust—the attempted genocide of European Jews and the wholesale murder of Gypsies, homosexuals and Slavs—completely altered the historical and cultural landscape of the Western world. The literature and films we will study in this course not only help us to understand what the Holocaust means to us, but also how these traumatic events challenged then, and still challenge now, the expressive capabilities of language and images. Even as the extreme qualities of the Holocaust severely test the capacity of art to represent extreme experiences, we rely on art to give form to collective memory. 

In this course, we will analyze and write about texts drawn from a range of genres, including survivor memoirs, fictional narratives, poetry, drama, essays and film. Each of these genres approaches the representation of the Holocaust in a different way: memoirs may appear to be unadorned testimony, but still make skillful use of literary techniques; fictional narratives sometimes try to reach the painful depths of the Holocaust by combining realistic passages with dream sequences and symbolism that usually have no place in memoir; poetry relies on metaphors to say what cannot be said directly about atrocity. Cinematic representations of the Holocaust, while employing a powerful language of images that has its own conventions, fall into the same range of categories, from testimony to historical fiction to the metaphorical. 

Our approach to the texts on the syllabus will be interdisciplinary, not only scrutinizing their literary and cinematic qualities, but also taking into consideration the specific social, political and philosophical contexts that shaped them.  

Primary Course Goals:  

1. To develop students’ reading and writing skills as well as their ability to think analytically.  
2. To make students aware of how diverse literary and cinematic genres may be employed to represent historical events.  
3. To elucidate the wider contexts in which the texts under study were produced and are now consumed some 75-80 years after the events they describe.  
4. To situate the Holocaust in a broad historical and multi-disciplinary context that makes reference to the recurrence of genocide and ethnic cleansing in the 20th century and now in the 21st century.  
5. To consider how the Holocaust undermines received ideas about the positive character and virtues of Western civilization and culture.
Required Texts: (Please purchase the same editions as those in the campus bookstores.)
- Tadeusz Borowski, This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen
- Primo Levi, Survival in Auschwitz
- Liana Millu, Smoke over Birkenau
- Cynthia Ozick, The Shawl
- Diane Samuels, Kindertransport
- Bernhard Schlink, The Reader
- Art Spiegelman, Maus II: A Survivor's Tale
- Elie Wiesel, Night [2006 edition, translated by Marion Wiesel; not the 1982 edition]


Note: The instructor will provide copies of 4 short Nazi texts and a selection of poems.

Assignments:

1. Three formal papers, about 4 pages in length; one on memoirs, one on film, one on a work of fiction. (Please see the handout “How to write papers for this course” for useful tips on producing preliminary outlines as well as structuring and editing your papers. The bases on which the instructor evaluates and grades your papers is also discussed there in some detail.)

2. A midterm essay exam; a final essay exam. The midterm exam will consist of synthetic questions about Holocaust memoirs, essays and films. Students will also identify key passages drawn from our texts and explain their larger significance. The final exam will include synthetic questions over the entire semester’s work, and also specific questions on the play and poems read toward the end of the course. More details about how to study for the tests will be made available later in the semester.

3. In-class writing. The weekly reading questions, provided by the professor, and class discussions will provide jumping-off points for 10 short, in-class writing assignments. THERE WILL BE NO MAKE-UPS. One purpose of these ungraded assignments is to act as seeds for the formal papers.

4. There will be 10 pass/fail reading quizzes to give students further incentives to read texts thoroughly before they are discussed in class. THERE WILL BE NO MAKE-UPS.

5. Class preparation and participation. Read carefully the pages indicated on the syllabus before each class; mark interesting or puzzling passages in the texts and take notes. Answer (just for yourself, not to turn in to the instructor) the weekly reading questions, which will act as the starting point for both class discussions and in-class writing assignments. The effective class participant comes to class prepared, shares ideas, and listens respectfully to others.

Graded work (Letter grade/percentage table is on p. 5): 100 total points

- 3 formal papers (20 points each): 60% of your grade / 60 points
- Midterm exam: 10% /10 points
- Final exam: 10% /10 points
- In-class writing (.5 points each): 5% /5 points
- In-class reading quizzes (.5 points each): 5% /5 points
- Participation: 10% /10 points
**Participation grades:** Active participation means answering the professor’s questions, asking questions of your own, making comments and/or offering opinions in a thoughtful and fruitful way.

10 (out of 10) will be awarded to students who **actively participate in every class**.
9 or 9.5 will be awarded to students who **actively participate in almost every class**.
8 or 8.5 will be awarded to students who **actively participate at least every week**.
7 or 7.5 will be awarded to students who **actively participate several times** during the term.
6 or 6.5 will be awarded to students who **actively participate a few times** during the term.
5 or 5.5 will be awarded to students who **attend class but do not actively participate**.

**Schedule of readings and discussions**

Aug. 21  Introduction and Background: What is the Holocaust and why study literary and cinematic responses to it? What about other instances of genocide?

Aug. 23  Four Nazi Texts: “Law for the Protection of German Blood”; “Protocols of the Wannsee Conference”; Himmler’s speech at Poznan; Hitler’s Political Testament

**Optional:** Doris Bergen, *War & Genocide*, pp. 1-13 (*1st half of chapter 1)*

**Part I: Memoirs and Essays** (weeks 2-5)

*An Atheist-Humanist Response to Auschwitz*


**Optional:** Bergen, *War & Genocide*, pp. 14-28 (*2nd half of chapter 1)*

Aug. 30  *Survival in Auschwitz*, pp. 116-173

Sept. 4  Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, pp. 11-21, 36-87

(Recommended: pp. 22-35)

Sept. 6  *The Drowned and the Saved*, 88-126, 149-166, 198-203

(Recommended: pp. 127-148, 167-197)

**A Religious Response to Auschwitz**

Sept. 11  Elie Wiesel, *Night*, pp. 1-84

(Recommended: pp. vii-xv, the new preface)

**Optional:** Bergen, *War & Genocide*, pp. 29-50 (chapter 2)

Sept. 13  *Night*, pp. 85-115

**A Holocaust Memoir in Comic Book Form!**

Sept. 18  Art Spiegelman, *Maus II: A Survivor’s Tale*, pp. 1-100

**Optional:** Bergen, *War & Genocide*, pp. 51-78 (chapter 3)

Sept. 20  *Maus II: A Survivor’s Tale*, pp. 101-136
In-class collaboration on outlines and drafts for paper #1, on memoirs.

**Part II: Film** (weeks 6-7)

**Note:** Two films to be viewed outside of class are Roberto Benigni’s *Life is Beautiful* (on Netflix and elsewhere) and Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (on Netflix and elsewhere). Please view both of them by **Oct. 8**.

*Non-fiction?*

Sept. 25  
Claude Lanzmann (director), *Shoah: An Oral History of the Holocaust* (a portion of part I)  
**Optional:** Bergen, *War & Genocide*, pp. 79-100 (chapter 4)

Sept. 27  
*Shoah*

*Historical Fiction?*

Oct. 2  
Agnieszka Holland (director), *Europa, Europa*  
**Optional:** Bergen, *War & Genocide*, pp. 101-134 (chapter 5)

Oct. 4  
*Europa, Europa*, **Paper #1 Due** (on memoirs)

Oct. 9  
Midterm Review

Oct. 11  
**Midterm Examination**

**Part III: Fiction** (weeks 9-12)

*In Auschwitz*

Oct. 16  
Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, pp. 29-49; 82-97  
(Recommended: pp. 9-26; 50-81)  
**Optional:** Bergen, *War & Genocide*, pp. 135-166 (chapter 6)

Oct. 18  
*This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, pp. 98-142  
(Recommended: pp. 143-180)

Oct. 23  
Liana Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, pp. 7-116  
In-class collaboration on outlines and drafts for paper #2, on film.

Oct. 25  
*Smoke over Birkenau*, pp. 119-197  
**Optional:** Bergen, *War & Genocide*, pp. 167-190 (1st half of chapter 7)

*In and After Auschwitz*

Oct. 30  
Cynthia Ozick, *The Shawl* pp. 3-10 ("The Shawl"); pp. 13-45 ("Rosa")  
**Paper #2 due** (on film)

Nov. 1  
NO CLASS/STUDY DAY
Nov. 6  
*The Shawl*, pp. 45-70 (“Rosa”);  
Optional: Bergen, *War & Genocide*, pp. 191-214 (2nd half of chapter 7)

*How Germany Remembers, How She Forgets*

Nov. 8  
Bernhard Schlink, *The Reader*, pp. 3-163 (parts 1 & 2)

Nov. 13  
*The Reader*, pp. 167-218 (part 3)  

**Part IV: Poetry and Drama** (weeks 13-14)

*The Power of Metaphor*

Nov. 15  
Holocaust poetry by Paul Celan, Dan Pagis, Denise Levertov, Primo Levi, Lily Brett and Anne Sexton.  
In-class collaboration on outlines and drafts for paper #3, on fiction.

THANKSGIVING BREAK

*Staging the Past in the Present*

Nov. 27  
Diane Samuels, *Kindertransport*, pp. vii-xxii (Background matter and personal accounts of the Kindertransport); pp. 1-46 (Act 1)

Nov. 29  
*Kindertransport*, pp. 47-87 (Act 2)  
Optional: Bergen, *War & Genocide*, pp. 233-244 (Conclusion)

**Part V: Conclusions** (week 15)

Dec. 4  
Course Conclusions and Review. **Paper #3 due** (on fiction).

Dec. 6  
**Final Exam**, in class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter grade/percentage table</th>
<th>Overall average to earn a Final Grade of a(n):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+ 98</td>
<td>A 89.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 95</td>
<td>B 79.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A- 92</td>
<td>C 69.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-/B+ 90</td>
<td>And so on…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+ 88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B 85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B- 82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-/C+ 80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And so on…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>