SYLLABUS: Holocaust Literature and Film
IDS 121.33, Honors section (2:00-3:15, Tuesdays & Thursdays)
Fall 2012

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

Office hours: Mondays, 11:00-12:00 and Thursdays, 3:15-4:15, and by appointment

Interdisciplinary Studies 121 (“Texts and Contexts”) is a writing intensive course in the “Language in the Humanities” category of the General Education curriculum at Illinois State University.

Course Introduction and Overview:

Corresponding roughly with the years of the Third Reich, 1933-1945, the Nazi 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 reality, we rely on art to give form to collective memory. Conversely, representations (i.e., art) of the Holocaust sometimes facilitate a self-deluding forgetfulness that sanitizes this traumatic past instead of confronting its unsettling aspects frankly.

In this course, we will analyze and write about texts drawn from a range of genres, including survivor memoirs (one in the form of a comic book), 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 have no place in memoir; poetry often 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 metaphor.

Our approach to the course texts 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. For example, we understand more fully the differences between Primo Levi’s memoir and Elie Wiesel’s when we recognize that Levi was an atheist humanist who returned to his Italian community after the war and that Wiesel was a devout Jew from a deeply religious Jewish community in Hungary that virtually ceased to exist as a result of the Holocaust.

Finally, our discussions will always return to the question of how the Holocaust, and other recent instances of genocide and ethnic cleansing, might challenge our faith in rationality and technology.

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.
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 character and virtues of Western culture.
Required Texts: (Please purchase the same editions found in the bookstores.)
Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*
Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*
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*

Also: two films will be screened; the instructor will provide copies of 4 short Nazi texts and a selection of poems.

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.

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 be a "take-home" test that includes 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 reading questions mentioned above and class discussion will provide jumping-off points for at least 9 (out of 10) short, in-class writing assignments. The exact dates of these assignments will not be announced in advance and THERE WILL BE NO MAKE-UPS. One purpose of these ungraded assignments, is to act as seeds for the formal papers.

Graded work:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage of Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 formal papers (20% each)</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class writing (9 out of 10)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation and participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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?
           --Tour of the website for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (www.ushmm.org)

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
           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

Aug. 28  Primo Levi, Survival in Auschwitz, pp. 9-115
           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)
           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
           (Recommended: Maus I; on reserve at Milner Library)
           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.
Part II: Film (weeks 6-8)

Note: Films viewed outside of class are Roberto Benigni’s Life is Beautiful and Steven Spielberg’s Schindler’s List. Video copies will be on reserve at Milner Library, 6th floor, or students may get together with classmates to rent and view videos. In case, please view them by Feb. 28.

Non-fiction?

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

Sept. 27 Shoah

Historical Fiction?

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

Oct. 4 Europa, Europa; Paper #1 Due (on memoir)

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)
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.

Oct. 25 Smoke over Birkenau, pp. 119-197
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
Nov. 6  The Shawl, pp. 45-70 ("Rosa")
        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)
       Bergen, War & Genocide, pp. 215-232 (chapter 8)

        Part IV: Drama and Poetry (weeks 13-15)

The Power of Metaphor

Nov. 15 Poetry by Paul Celan and Dan Pagis.
        Bergen, War & Genocide, pp. 233-244 (Conclusion)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Nov. 27 Poetry by other poets.
        In-class collaboration on outlines and drafts for paper #3.

        Staging the Past in the Present

Nov. 29 Diane Samuels, Kindertransport, pp. xi-46 (Act 1)


Dec. 6  Course Conclusions: Holocaust Studies as Genocide Studies
        Discuss Prof. Druker’s review of Rothberg’s Multidirectional Memory
        “Take home” final essay exam distributed.

Final essay exam due by 4 pm, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11 to Prof. Druker’s mailbox in
Stevenson Hall 114.  (Druker’s mailbox is in the top row.)