

HUMA 6204
Fall 2006
York University

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Holocaust Narratives:

Exploring the Limits of Representation

This course explores a central paradox that informs Holocaust narratives: the impulse to tell and the fear that one can not tell what occurred. Both scholars and survivors have argued that the Holocaust eludes description, that it cannot be understood by those who have not experienced it at first-hand. Often, scholars and survivors alike assert that there exists a basic incompatibility or inappropriateness to transmuting the Holocaust into narrative forms. At the same time, many survivors have written memoirs and novels about their experiences, and researchers in many disciplines continue to write about the Nazi genocide.

By examining a range of Holocaust narratives, including lifewriting and focusing on fiction, the course focuses on the place of atrocity and loss in shaping narrative memory, the production of history and historical memory (and the differences between those), and the sets of cultural meanings that an event acquires.

Books - required (available at bookstore and on reserve)

Aharon Appelfeld, *The Iron Tracks*
Louis Begley, *Wartime Lies*
Charlotte Delbo. *Auschwitz and After*
Ida Fink. *A Scrap of Time*
Sarah Kofman, *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*
Cynthia Ozick. *The Shawl*
Jorge Semprun, *The Long Voyage*
Art Spiegelman. *MAUS*
Michel Tournier, *The Ogre*
Elie Wiesel. *Night* Douglas & McIntyre

September 14 **Introduction**

Holocaust Narratives
Major issues: Memory, Historiography, Language, Culture
Direct and indirect narratives

September 21 **History, Memory, and Imagination**

Readings: *Wartime Lies*
Améry, "On Torture" *AML*
Horowitz, "The Idea of Fiction," *VOV* 1-45
Langer, "In the Beginning Was Silence," *H&LI*

- Sokoloff, Naomi. "Childhood Lost," *VCL* 259-74
- September 28 **Narrating the Self under Atrocity**
Readings: Delbo, *Auschwitz and After* (selections: 3-114;117-22;139-54; 219-31; 257-67)
 Des Pres, "The Excremental Assault" *S* 53-71
 Lanzmann, "The Obscenity of Understanding" in *TEM*
 Lejeune, "Introduction" *OA*
 Scary, "Structure of Torture," *BP* 27-59
- October 5 **Narrating Jewish Memory**
Readings: *Night*
 Lang, "Introduction," *A&I* (xi-xxii)
 Yerushalmi, "Modern Dilemmas" *Z* 81-103
 Seidman, "Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage" (dist.)
- October 12 **Disaster Writing**
Readings: Semprun, *The Long Journey*
 Horowitz, "The Figure of Muteness" *VV*
 LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss," *HTR* 199-204
- October 19 **Issues of Memory and Transmission; Secondary Witnessing**
Readings: Ida Fink, *A Scrap of Time*
 Rosenfeld, "Problematics of Holocaust Literature" *DD* 12-34
 Young, "Writing the Holocaust" *HTR* 335-38
- October 26 **Reading Week, no class**
- November 2 **Trauma**
Readings: Appelfeld, *The Iron Tracks*, "Bertha," "Buried Homeland" (dist)
 "After the Holocaust" *WH* 83-92
 Caruth, "Trauma and Experience" *HTR* 192-198
 Langer, "Deep Memory: The Buried Self" *HTR* 354-59
- November 9 **Narrating the Gendered Self I**
Readings: *The Shawl*
 Goldstein: "The Legacy of Raizel Kaidish" (dist.)
 Ringelheim, "Thoughts about Women and the Holocaust," *TU* 141- 49.
 Schoenfeld, "Auschwitz and the Professors." *Commentary* (June 1998): 42-46. (On-line)
 Horowitz, "Gender, Genocide, and Jewish Memory." *Prooftexts* 20 (January 2000) 1:158-190 (on-line)
 Grossman, "Feminist Debates about Women and National Socialism." *Gender and History* 3 (1991): 350-58.

- November 16 **NO CLASS: To be rescheduled**
Narrating Europe
Readings: *The Ogre*
 Santner, “History Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (HTR 214-220)
 Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism” *USS*
 Friedlander, *RN* 23-53, 85-115
 Horowitz, “Refused Memory” *VV* 181-216
- November 23 **Belated Memoirs**
Readings: Kofman
 Blanchot, *WD* 1-27, 41-49
- November 30 **Transmission**
Alternatives to/as Narrative
Readings: Spiegelman, *MAUS*
 Hirsch, “Mourning and Postmemory” *FF* 17-40
 Lefkowitz, “Inherited Holocaust Memory and the Ethics of Ventriloquism,” *SL*
 Raczynow, “Memory Shot Through with Holes,” *HTR* 410-15
- December 7 **The Ethics of Memory**
Readings: Ignatieff, “Lemkin’s Word,” *New Republic* 21 February 2001

You will note that each week features a primary text (or texts) that may be found in a book available at the book store, or on a photocopy distributed in class. The books ordered through the bookstore have been placed on reserve in Scott Library. In addition, supplementary readings may be found on reserve or, in some cases, on-line.

Some recommendations for Background Historical Reading

Bauer, Yehuda, *A History of the Holocaust*
 Bergen, Doris, *A Concise History of the Holocaust*
 Gilbert, Martin, *The Holocaust: A history of the Jews of Europe during the Second World War*
 Gilbert, Martin, *The Holocaust: A Record of the Destruction of Jewish Life during the Dark Years of Nazi Rule*
 Hilberg, Raul, *Destruction of the European Jews*

Evaluation:

- a. You will prepare a substantive essay (15-20 pages) – the equivalent of an article suitable for publication – by the end of the semester. This work will be ongoing during the term, and you will present work-in-progress reports throughout the year. (50%)
- b. You are expected to complete the assigned readings on time and to participate actively in seminar discussions. (10%)

- c. You will write a short reactionnaire (issues, exploration of the readings) for class distribution via an internet distribution list, each week, to be posted no later than Tuesday evening preceding the Thursday that readings are due. (10%)
- d. You will take responsibility for two presentations during the term. (@ 15%)