

Literature of the Holocaust: English and Jewish Studies 534
Spring 2014
Loyola Marymount University

Dr. Holli Levitsky
Tuesday 4:30-7 pm
Office: University Hall 3863
Office Hours: M 1-3, T 2-4 and by appointment
Telephone: 310.338.7664; Email: hlevitsk@lmu.edu

“During the war it seemed that, for years, until we reached a ripe old age, we would not cease telling of the horrors of the war. There were people who remained alive only because of the power of that hope: after the war, they would tell Immediately after the war, the desire was overturned. People were filled with silence. Everything that happened was so gigantic, so inconceivable, that the witness even seemed like a fabricator to himself. The feeling that your experience cannot be told, that no one can understand it, is perhaps one of the worst that was felt by the survivors after the war . . .” —Aharon Appelfeld

“Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men and women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must—at that moment—become the center of the universe.... And action is the only remedy to indifference, the most insidious danger of all.” -Elie Wiesel

“In both Torah and Talmud the injunction to relate one’s witness of an iniquity is taken by the rabbis as explicitly commanded: ‘And he is a witness whether he has seen or known of it; if he does not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity’ (Lev. 5:1).” —James Young

" . . . a tension exists between events as they actually happened and the implications of these events for individual fate and the destiny of humanity. The former (the events) dwell (and hence disappear) in time, victims of temporality; the latter (the implications), rescued from oblivion by memory and imagination, endure in a realm--in the case of the literature of atrocity--that is partly invented and partly recreated from episodes which themselves appear too fantastic to be anything but fiction. One of the main problems--and confusions--in assessing such literature is the failure to distinguish between the two terms of this 'tension'--actuality (events that literally occurred, the slow strangulation of the boy or the hurling of infants into a pit of flames in *Night*, for example), and reality, the attempts of the mind to absorb such events into a literary harmony or to compose a new dissonance that will make them enduring and meaningful to the imaginative "ear." -Lawrence Langer

" . . . poetry can no longer speak the language which many a willing ear still seems to expect from it. Its language has become more austere and factual; it distrusts the beautiful, and it attempts to be true. It is thus . . . a 'grayer' language, a language which among other things wants to see its

'musicality' situated in a region where it has nothing in common with that 'harmoniousness' which in a more or less unconcerned manner sounded with and along side the horrors." – Paul Celan

“The great historian Shimon Dubnov served as our guide and inspiration. Until the moment of his death he said over and over again to his companions in the Riga ghetto: "Yidden, shreibt un fershreibt" (Jews, write it all down). His words were heeded. Overnight, countless victims become chroniclers and historians in the ghettos, even in the death camps. Even members of the Sonderkommandos, those inmates forced to burn their fellow inmates' corpses before being burned in turn, left behind extraordinary documents. To testify became an obsession. They left us poems and letters, diaries and fragments of novels, some known throughout the world, others still unpublished.” — Elie Wiesel

REQUIRED TEXTS

This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen, by Tadeusz Borowski

Art From the Ashes, Lawrence Langer

Survival in Auschwitz, by Primo Levi

Auschwitz: True Tales from a Grotesque Land, by Sara Nomberg-Przytk

Maus (vols. I & II), by Art Spiegelman

Night, by Elie Wiesel

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

The Destruction of the European Jews, by Raul Hilberg (one volume student edition, paper)

The Texture of Memory, by James E. Young

Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust, by James E. Young

The required texts, all paperback, have been ordered at the university bookstore. The recommended texts may also be purchased at the bookstore. All books are available in used editions on Amazon.com. Throughout the semester I will also distribute other photocopied reading materials for the class, and there will be guest speakers and events which you will either be required to attend or which you may attend for extra credit.

COURSE DESCRIPTION, GOALS, ATTENDANCE, & PARTICIPATION IN CLASS

This course examines the literary responses to the Holocaust—the Shoah, including diaries, journals, memoirs, and poetry. Our work will be informed by the notion that literary responses to the Holocaust are, as Carolyn Forché has written, in themselves "material evidence of that-which occurred."

Reading and discussion will address such issues as the evidentiary nature of literary responses to the Shoah, the problem of representation, and the literary commodification of the Holocaust.

Our objectives for the course will be to establish a context for reading Holocaust literature by studying the literature of witness; do close readings of journals, diaries, memoirs, and poetry written by those who experienced the Shoah; write critical responses to texts; participate in class discussions.

Holocaust literature, unlike any other subject, makes great demands on our hearts and spirits. Indeed, we sometimes refer to Holocaust Literature as the “literature of atrocity.” What we do in

this class does not swerve or turn away from human suffering and human cruelty, even deliberate, extreme cruelty. I expect you to read deeply and attentively, to ask questions, and to share your thinking. I insist that you respect the memories of the victims and survivors and the discourse of your fellow classmates as we struggle to engage this difficult subject.

You must attend one three-hour seminar each week. Attendance means critical, lively concentration and assessment of work at hand. Every class is important, and our time together is short. I expect you to attend every class prepared and to participate in the discussions of the class. If you miss three classes (equal to 9 class hours), your final grade will be dropped one letter grade. Four or more absences (equal to 12 class hours) mean that you will fail the course. Failure to make up a scheduled conference counts as an absence. If you fail to return to class after the class break, you will be counted absent. If an emergency or illness prevents your attending, please notify me by e-mail. If you are absent, you are still accountable for anything discussed or done that class.

I do not accept late work. If you are absent, I will accept assignments e-mailed to hlevitsk@lmu.edu until 11:59 PM of the day the assignment is due.

All the latest course information, changes, due dates, and requirements will be posted on the Blackboard Announcements page and/or in class. Check the Blackboard site regularly throughout the week but especially on the day of class (when last-minute changes are most likely to occur). You may bring computers to class but keep them off your desk unless you are instructed otherwise. All phones must be turned off and put away during class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES

Grades for this course will be figured on a point system. You will know the point value of any assignment at the time the assignment is made, but here are the major categories of assignments and the point values:

Survivor Memoir Review: 800 word review of a survivor memoir. You will be assigned the memoir on January 21st in class. This project has several parts, some of which depend on whether your survivor is still alive and able to be interviewed:

1) you will read the memoir; 2) you will research the history of Jews in the city/village of the survivor's birth, and what life was like at the time they lived there; 3) you will interview the survivor (I will guide you through this); 4) you will write an 800-word summary/analysis of the memoir, fleshing out the analysis with the history you read and personal testimony gathered from the interview; 5) you will create a 200-250-word concise summary of your review (to be used in the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust brochure); 6) you will write a 1-2 page reflection paper about the process of writing this assignment. A finished draft of the 800-word summary/analysis is due on April 15th by email to me at hlevitsk@lmu.edu. You must meet with me to go through your draft during a scheduled conference time during the week of April 22 (I will assign times). The entire project (final draft of review, shorter summary, and reflection paper) will be due to me in person at our April 29th class time. – 200 points

Close Readings/Explication de texte papers (two). Your work in this course includes significant writing. You are required to write two close readings/explication de textes of 3- 5 pages (750 -1250 words) each.

These are entirely your readings and analyses of the assigned texts through the prism of the literature of witness, intended to exercise your critical and analytical faculties. Outside research is neither desirable nor allowed. The topics/and or passages to be analyzed will be distributed in class a week or so before the due date. You are encouraged to arrange conferences before the submission date to discuss and evaluate your preparation and /or drafts. Prepare the papers according to the MLA style sheet. —100 points per assignment

Critical Analysis Essay: Choose 2 readings (or 1 entire book) from class to compare/contrast through the framework of the theory or debate presented in one of the critical articles I will post on our Blackboard site. More details will be distributed in class. The choices can be 2 poems, 2 short stories-same or different authors-poem and short story). 5-7 pages.—150 points

Midterm Examination (hour exam) —100 points

Final Examination (hour examination during exam week)—150 points. The Final will have one essay question that is cumulative. The remainder of the Final Examination will consider all the material since the midterm examination. The mid-term and final examinations will also have major essay components wherein you will be asked to read and interrogate the works through the prism of the literature of witness.

For each examination you will be given a study guide that lists the essay questions. From the several questions offered on the study guide only ONE or possibly TWO will appear on the examination. To facilitate your reading and preparation you will also be given a blank study sheet that you should take to the examination. On both sides of the study sheet, write or type drafts (or notes toward drafts) of your examination essays. Your study sheet may also include identification items and other information you may want to remember, but it is intended chiefly to allow you to draft your essays before the examination.

Group Creative Assignment: Details and list of possible projects to follow. —50 points

Contribution to class discussions and participation (including Blackboard/online, individual and group work, etc.)—50 possible points per semester

Miscellaneous in-class writing assignments or reading quizzes 10-50 points each; these may not be announced.

Extra Credit opportunities: Attend either one or all of the following events, and write a 1-2 page response essay linking the event to something you've learned in class:

1) "The Key Game Project: Sleep, Staring, Well," based on the short story "The Key Game," by Ida Fink. <http://www.automata-la.org/calendar.html> (dates are this week: January 16, 17, 18 and you should buy your tickets online).

2) Jewish Book and Discussion Series at the WHHannon Library on January 26th, 2-3:30.
<http://lmu.libcal.com/event.php?id=559554&hs=a>

3) Attend a Passover seder.

You must complete all assignments to earn a grade in the course. No late work will be accepted. If you fail to submit an assignment (Critical Analysis, for instance) you will receive a grade of zero for that assignment. Your semester's grade is determined by the percentage of points you earn in relation to the number of points possible. Here are the breakdowns for each letter grade: 94-100% = A; 90-93% = A-; 87-89% = B+; 84-86 = B; 80-83 = B-; 77-79 = C+; 74-76 = C; 70-73 = C-.

Type all out-of-class assignments and prepare them according to the MLA style sheet. You should keep a record of all assignments submitted, their dates and points earned, for your protection. You should save everything related to this course until the course is completed. Do not destroy any

drafts, assignments, or records associated with this course until the course is well past and you have received your grade.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

All members of the university community have the responsibility to maintain and foster an atmosphere of academic integrity. Specifically, this requires that all classroom, laboratory, and written work for which a person claims credit is in fact that person's own work. You assume responsibility for the content and integrity of the academic work you submit. You violate the academic honesty code if you incorporate into your written or oral texts any unacknowledged published or unpublished or oral material from the work of another (plagiarism) or if you use, request, or give unauthorized assistance in any academic work (cheating). I will not tolerate plagiarism or cheating. Incidents of either will result in at minimum a failing grade for the assignment in question. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, ask me.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with Disabilities: Students with special needs who need reasonable modifications, special assistance, or accommodations in this course should promptly direct their request to the Disability Support Services Office. Any student who currently has a documented disability (physical, learning, or psychological) needing academic accommodations should contact the Disability Services Office (Daum Hall #224, x8-4535) as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. Please visit <http://www.lmu.edu/dss> for additional information.

COURSE READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Throughout the semester I will also distribute other photocopied reading materials for the class, and there will be guest speakers. I may change this schedule if the needs of the class so warrant. You will be notified in class and via Blackboard regarding any changes.

Week 1—January 14

Introduction: Holocaust Literature- Reading through the Prism of The Literature of Witness
Night and Fog (Alain Resnais); "The Key Game," Ida Fink

Week 2—January 21

Lawrence Langer's introductions (to the anthology as a whole and to sections 1 and 2) 3-15 and 153-158 in *Art from the Ashes*

Primo Levi, "Shame," in *Art from the Ashes*, 108-115

Elie Wiesel, "A Plea for the Dead," in *Art from the Ashes*, 137-152

Writing Assignment/Engaged Learning Component: Survivor Memoir Review

Week 3—January 28

Class will meet at the Museum of Tolerance for a private tour of the Anne exhibit. I will either organize a bus or carpools. The tour is from 4:30-6:00 pm.

http://www.museumoftolerance.com/site/c.tmL6KfNVLtH/b.8837919/k.88AC/Anne_Exhibit.htm

Week 4—February 4

Jean Améry, "Torture," in *Art from the Ashes*, 119-138

Week 5—February 11

Abraham Lewin, "Diary of the Great Deportation" in *Art from the Ashes*, 159-96

Avraham Tory, "Memoir, in *Art from the Ashes*, 215-32

Josef Zerkowicz, "Days of Nightmare" in *Art from the Ashes*, 197-214

Week 6—February 18

Class will meet in the Von der Ahe Family Suite in the WHHannon Library. Louise Steinman, author of *The Crooked Mirror: A Memoir of Polish Jewish Reconciliation*, will be the guest speaker, 4:30-6:30

Writing Assignments: Distribute Guide to Close Reading/Explication de texte #1

Week 7—February 25

Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way For the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*

Writing Assignments: Due: Close Reading/Explication de texte #1

MARCH 4: Spring Break-NO CLASS

Week 8—March 11

Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*

Primo Levi, "Shema" (from the untitled epigraph in *Survival in Auschwitz*). The poem "Shema" echoes the central prayer of Judaism, found in Deuteronomy 6:5-9, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." The epigraph alerts the reader to the seriousness with which *Survival in Auschwitz* is to be approached.

Week 9—March 18

Sara Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz: True Tales From a Grotesque Land*

Charlotte Delbo, "Voices" in *Art from the Ashes*, 75-92.

Writing Assignments: Distribute Guide to: Close Reading/Explication de texte #2

Week 10—March 25

Elie Wiesel, *Night*

Due: Close Reading / Explication de texte #2 (TBA)

Distribute Study Guide with Study Sheet for Midterm Examination

Week 11—April 1

Midterm Examination

Art Spiegelman, *Maus I and Maus II*

Week 12—April 8

Introduction: Reading The Poetry of Witness

Langer, "Poetry" in *Art from the Ashes*, 553-559

Dan Pagis, "Introduction" in *Art from the Ashes*, 584-85

Dan Pagis, "Written in Pencil," 588 and "Autobiography," 586, "Draft of a Reparations Agreement," 592

Writing Assignment: Critical Analysis Essay Assigned.

Week 13—April 15- Passover. Class will not meet (Passover). Students should work on their creative assignments. (A list of possible assignments will be distributed.)

Week 14—April 22

Miklos Radnóti, "Introduction" in *Art from the Ashes*, 618-19

Paul Celan, "Introduction" in *Art from Ashes* (598-600)

Paul Celan, "Todesfuge" in *Art from Ashes* (601)

Paul Celan, "There was Earth Inside Them," in *Art from the Ashes* (607)

Paul Celan, "Psalm" in *Art from Ashes* (608)

Nelly Sachs, "Introduction" in *Art from the Ashes*, 635-37)

Nelly Sachs, "O' The Night of the Weeping Children, in *Art From the Ashes*, 638

Jacob Glatstein, "Introduction" in *Art from the Ashes* (653-54)

BONUS CLASS: REQUIRED EVENT. April 27th, 12-4, Beverly Hills Hotel. Please let me know ASAP if you have a conflict. This is a Holocaust-survivor event where you will have an opportunity to engage with survivors and their families. It is very formal: dressy attire required. Carpools will be arranged.

2-page reflection paper due May 1st, by email. Please answer this prompt: Explore your experience at the "1939" Society Banquet in light of what you know about the Holocaust. How did the event affect your understanding of the effects of the Holocaust? You may pick an aspect to address more specifically, such as education, anti-Semitism, the effects of trauma, etc.

Week 15—April 29

Film and speaker event: *The Quarrel*, with writer David Brandes. Location to be announced.

Distribute Study Guide to Final Examination (with Study Sheet)

Final Examination, Tuesday, May 6th, 4:30-6:30