

Cary Nelson
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SYLLABUS—ENGLISH 396: HOLOCAUST POETRY (HONORS SEMINAR)

Spring 2014, Wednesday 3:00-4:50, 125 English Bldg.

OFFICE HOUR: 5-6pm Wednesday, 105 EB

REQUIRED TEXTS (all paperbound):

Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*.

Hilda Schiff, ed., *Holocaust Poetry*

Poems of Paul Celan, trans. Michael Hamburger (revised & expanded edition)

Charles Reznikoff, *Holocaust*

Lyn Lifshin, *Blue Tattoo: Poems of the Holocaust*

Nelly Sachs, *Collected Poems 1944-1949*

Charles Fishman, Ed. *Blood to Remember: American Poets on the Holocaust*, 2nd edition

Susan Gubar, *Poetry After Auschwitz*

Please be sure to bring each week's assigned readings to class, along with printouts of the email posts.

Beginning with the January 29 class, everyone sends an email to the rest of the class once a week—by Tuesday at the latest—analyzing one poem or talking about one issue or theme from that week's readings. These posts are typically two pages long. In addition to commenting on a poem or comparing two or more poems, the post can raise questions for discussion. These posts help focus your thinking, establish poems for intensive analysis in class, and get our conversation going before the seminar meets. Some people build their final paper around one or more of their weekly posts.

January 22: Martin Gilbert, "The Final Solution." Abraham Sutzkever, "Poem About a Herring"; Dan Pagis. "Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car"; William Heyen, "Riddle" [also see Gubar, pp. 219-20].

January 29 (Witness): Lily Brett, "Lost" [handout]. Ilse Weber, "Theresienstadt Nursery Rhyme" [handout]. From Hilda Schiff, ed. *Holocaust Poetry*—"Introduction." From Susan Gubar, *Poetry After Auschwitz*, pp. 1-13. From *Holocaust Poetry*: Sutzkever, "A Cartload of Shoes," "How" (pp. 22-29), Tadeusz Rozewicz, "Pigtail" (p. 71); Dan Pagis, "Testimony" (p. 43); Miklos Radnoti, "Clouded Sky" (p. 24), "Forced March" (p.46); Czeslaw Milosz, "A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto" (pp. 87-88); George Macbeth, "A Poem of Death" (p. 54); Nelly Sachs, "Already Embraced by the Arm of Heavenly Solace" (p. 68).

February 5 (Postwar Testimony I): From Gubar, *Poetry After Auschwitz*, pp. 28-30 and 207-218; from *Holocaust Poetry*: Primo Levi, "Shema" (p. 205); Van K. Brock, "Remembering Dresden" (pp. 58-59); Antonio Slonimski, "Elegy" (p. 26); Elie Wiesel, "Never Shall I Forget" (p. 42); Rozewicz, "Posthumous Rehabilitation" (pp. 169-70);

Bertolt Brecht, "War Has Been Given a Bad Name" (p. 172); Peter Porter, "May, 1945" (p. 171); Edward Bond, "If" (p. 145); Geoffrey Hill, "September Song" (p. 96); Janos Pilinsky, "Harbach 1944" (pp. 48-49).

February 12 (Historical Perspectives): Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*. From Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, chapter 6 ("Final Solution") and chapter 8 ("The Nazi Death Factories") [electronic reserves]. From *Holocaust Poetry*: Denise Levertov, "During the Eichmann Trial" (pp. 164-66) [see also Gubar, pp. 158-62].

February 19 (Postwar Testimony II): From *Holocaust Poetry*: Anthony Hecht, "More Light! More Light!" [see also Gubar 146-49 and MAPS under Hecht], "The Book of Yolek" (pp. 144-45) [see also Gubar, pp.237-39]; Yevgeny Yevtushenko, "Babii Yar" (pp. 92-94); Paul Celan, "Psalm" (p. 190); James Fenton, "A German Requiem" (pp. 103-106);); Randall Jarrell, "A Camp in the Prussian Forest" (p.p. 97-98) and "Protocols" (Handout); Robert Pinsky, "The Unseen" (handout).

February 26: (The Poetry of Fact): Charles Reznikoff, *Holocaust* [see also Gubar, 151-54 and MAPS under Reznikoff]; Lyn Lifshin, *Blue Tattoo: Poems of the Holocaust*.

March 5: Nelly Sachs, Collected Poems 1944-1949, including "O the Chimneys," "O the Night of the Weeping Children," "What Secret Cravings of the Blood," "You Onlookers," "If I Only Knew," "Night, Night," "Numbers," "Old Men," "O the Homeless Colors of the Evening Sky," "In the Evening Your Vision Widens," "Peoples of the Earth," "Landscape of Screams," "Chorus of the Rescued," "Chorus of the Orphans," "Chorus of the Shadows," and "Chorus of the Unborn," "Peoples of the Earth." Elaine Martin (on "O the Chimneys" and "Chorus of the Shadows" from Martin, *Nelly Sachs: The Poetics of Silence and the Limits of Representation*) [electronic reserves].

March 12: Abraham Sutzkever: "Faces in Swamps" I-V, "My every breath is a curse," "How," "Grains of Wheat," "Frozen Jews," "Stalks," "Resurrection," "Black Thorns," "In the Cell," "For My Child," "Burnt Pearls," "Self-Portrait." [electronic Reserves]

March 19: Miklos Radnoti: "War Diary 1-4," "Guard and Protect Me," "In a Troubled Hour," "Like Death," "Floral Song," "The Fifth Eclogue (fragment)," "O Ancient Prisons," "Dreamscape," "Fragment," "Root," "Forced March," "Razgledncas." [Electronic Reserves]. Translation comparisons—"Razgledncas" [handout]. Zsuzsanna Ozsvath, "In Extremis: 1944" from *In the Footsteps of Orpheus: The Life and Times of Miklos Radnoti* [electronic reserves].

SPRING BREAK

April 2: Paul Celan: *Poems of Paul Celan*, trans. Michael Hamburger, including "The Travelling Companion" (p. 41), "In Front of a Candle" (pp. 55-57), "Wolf's Bean" (pp. 341-45), "Shibboleth" (p. 67), "Death Fugue" (pp. 31-33) [see also Gubar, p. 68], "Tenebrae" (p. 89), "Assisi" (p. 51), "Speak, You Also" (p. 69), "Isleward" (p. 77),

“Snow-Bed” (p. 97), “The Straightening” (pp. 115-127). John Felstiner (on “Death Fugue”) [electronic reserves].

April 9: Postwar American Holocaust Poetry: from Charles Fishman, ed. *Blood to Remember: American Poets On the Holocaust*, Revised, second edition: Jehanne Dubrow, “Shulamith Writes *Fuck You*” (p. 119); Gerald Stern, “Adler” (pp. 428-30) [see also, Gubar, pp. 215-17] and “Soap” (pp.430-32) [see also Gubar, pp. 222-24]; Tsipi Keller, “The Shower” (pp. 236-37); Sheila Golburgh Johnson, “Shoes” (p. 208); Aaron Kurtz, “A Million Pairs of Shoes” (pp. 268-70). [to be expanded]

April 16: Sylvia Plath: “Getting There” “Daddy” “Lady Lazarus.” From Gubar, *Poetry After Auschwitz*, pp. 177-206. [see also MAPS under Plath]. **Draft paper topic due.**

April 23: Alterative Aesthetics: Lily Brett & Jorie Graham (handouts): Lily Brett, [handout] “To the Left,” “Children I,” “Children II,” “Invisible,” “Sport,” “Muselmanner,” “Another Selection,” “The Toilet,” “Marilla,” “The First Job,” “The Last Day,” all from Brett, *The Auschwitz Poems* (1986). Jorie Graham, “From the New World” [see also Gubar, pp. 96-98] and “History” [see also Gubar, pp. 128-31].

April 30: Catchup Week: Poems We Failed to Discuss

May 7: Conclusion. Final paper due, about 20 pages in length. The paper can be a study of one poet, a comparison of two or more poets, or a treatment of an issue that runs through a number of the poets we have studied. I am more interested in your original analyses than in summaries of existing criticism, but you should acknowledge other critics’ work and either agree or disagree with it when it exists.

Note: MAPS (Modern American Poetry Site) is located at
<http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/>

Click on “Criticism,” then “classic list of poets” to access material on Hecht, Plath, and other poets with MAPS pointers above.

There is also a tremendous amount of information about the Holocaust online. I’ve set up a site with some basic information at:

<http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/holocaust/holocaust.htm>

my personal web site is
www.cary-nelson.org