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LS 350.80: After the Holocaust - Literature, Human Values & the Uses of Memory

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After the Holocaust: Literature, Human Values & the Uses of Memory

LS 350.80 E/W
Spring 2001
DHC 120, M/W 4:10-5:30

Michael Kreisberg
Office: 724 Eddy (basement, #8)
Hours: M/W: 2-4 & by app't.
(w) 243-2685; (h) 728-0713

I. Course Materials (all books are on 2-hour library reserve; films are at IMS)

- Books:** Lawrence Langer--*Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology*
Primo Levi--*Survival in Auschwitz* and *The Drowned and the Saved*
Terrence Des Pres--*The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps*
Charlotte Delbo--*Auschwitz and After*
Elie Wiesel--*Night* Art Spiegelman--*Maus I & II*
Simon Wiesenthal--*The Sunflower* Jerzy Kosinski--*The Painted Bird*
- Films:** Steven Spielberg--*Survivors of the Shoah*; Alain Resnais--*Night and Fog*;
Pierre Sauvage--*Weapons of the Spirit*; Claude Lanzmann--*Shoah*

II. Course Outline

- Week 1.** Intro to Holocaust Literature--what it is and what it isn't
Wiesel, *Night*; Langer, pp. 3-9, 137-152
Film: Spielberg, *Survivors of the Shoah*
- Week 2.** The Memory of the Offense--memoir
Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*; Langer, pp. 106-118 ****Journals due Wed. (2/7)**
- Week 3.** Stranger than fiction, Holocaust facts
The way it was--Langer, pp. 11-105, 119-136
Journals and Diaries--Langer, pp. 153-233
- Week 4.** "Just try to look. Try to see"--memoir
Delbo, *Auschwitz and After* (I) ****No class Mon. (2/19); Journals due Wed. (2/21)**
- Week 5.** Delbo (cont.), *Auschwitz and After* (II & III)
- Week 6.** Testing our responses
Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower*
Film: *Night and Fog* ****Journals due Wed. (3/7)**
- Week 7.** Holocaust fiction--"choiceless choices"
Langer, pp. 235-70 (Mon.); pp. 271-341 (Wed.) ****Papers due Wed. (3/14)**
- Week 8.** —SPRING BREAK / READING WEEK—
- Week 9.** Fiction (cont.): Langer, pp. 342-77 (Mon.); 405-470 (Wed.)
- Week 10.** Holocaust fiction (cont.)
Kosinski, *The Painted Bird* ****Journals due Wed. (4/4)**
- Week 11.** Holocaust laughter
Spiegelman, *Maus I & II*
- Week 12.** "Conspiracies of goodness," mutual aid, etc.
Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps*
Film: *Weapons of the Spirit* ****Journals due Wed. (4/18)**
- Week 13.** "It is a world. One must enter it."
Film: *Shoah* (plus handouts) ****Revised papers due 4/25**
- Week 14.** Holocaust poetry: "We were gardeners without flowers"
Langer, pp. 553-662 plus handouts ****Journals due Wed. (5/2)**
- Week 15.** Working against any false sense of closure
Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* ****[A short critical assessment due 5/9]**
- Finals Week.** We meet Thursday (5/17), 3:20-5:20

"There are events of such overbearing magnitude that one ought not to remember them all the time, but one must not forget them either. Such an event is the Holocaust"—R. Israel Spira

III. Writing Assignments

Journals: To be explained in class (also see below) and submitted regularly beginning 2/7 (see schedule).

Papers: A three-to-four-page paper due 3/14; a five-to-six-page revision due 4/25; and a short, sharp, critical assessment of Levi's final work due 5/9 (see reminders above and discussion below). All topics to be discussed as we move through the material.

IV. Ethical Contract

Everyone is expected to attend all classes and films, stay current with reading assignments, get papers and journals in on time, and come to class prepared to participate in discussions. As a small group, we can work out any scheduling problems with films. Grades will be based on written work and contributions to discussions. More than two absences--or excessive tardiness--may significantly lower one's grade AND lead to additional assignments. **Choosing to remain in this class constitutes agreement with this contract. Please take sufficient time to consider this carefully.**

Re: Writing Assignments

Journals: Each of you will keep a journal of your ideas about and responses to the weekly readings/discussions/films. There are to be at least three entries per week of a length determined by you (and your subject), **BUT** they are expected to be serious, thoughtful, original and of substance. You are not to summarize but rather to explore a specific issue or idea raised by the text/discussion/film. Grammar is not a worry here: Use your journal as a tool for pondering your responses to and understanding of what you read and what we talk about in class. These journals should provide you with a substantial running commentary on your questions, frustrations, discoveries and imaginings during the semester. You are expected to stay current with readings/discussions/films and not wait for the 'correct' interpretation. *Please date entries and keep returned journals until the semester is over.*

I will collect journal entries every few weeks and return them promptly, *so they should be on pages you can tear out of a pad or unhook from a binder and staple or clip together*. This will allow you to continue making entries even while I read what you have already written. Primarily this journal is to serve you ---I am the eavesdropper, the friendly and hopefully helpful reader. Note, however, that these are academic journals (not diaries) and they account for a major part of your grade; so I expect thoughtful and attentive work to be done in them. *As reader, I need to see in every entry concrete language and examples from texts, films and discussions.* The objective is to get you to pay stricter attention to the interconnected process of reading/thinking/writing--and, of course, to get you to feel more at ease speaking up in class discussions. You should use your journals to pose (and begin to answer) the questions you are expected to bring to each class. Thinking about the material and developing those thoughts in your journals should make participating in class discussions both more productive and more fun. *Note that the materials encountered in this course are likely to be unexpectedly disturbing. Keeping in touch with our emotional, as well as intellectual, responses is essential for our individual and collective well-being.*

Papers: There will be three (3) scheduled papers (see above), the second a revision/expansion of the first, and the third one just to keep us all making the most of our 15 weeks. Possible topics will be suggested as we move through the material, and it may be useful for you to suggest topics as they occur to you and to explore them in your journals. I expect you to write thoughtful, well-argued and well-organized papers with all sources briefly but clearly identified. Be sure to choose your topics wisely and pay serious attention to grammar, organization, etc. (The *Writing Lab*, an excellent and confidential resource, is unfortunately no longer funded. Other help exists; see me.) In addition to the three assigned papers there may be occasional in-class writing activities.

Papers are to be typed, double-spaced, lengths specified above, and with all sources clearly identified. Always use specific language and details from the texts of films; avoid overgeneralizations and abstractions. The trick on short papers is to focus. The revision involves taking my comments and suggestions and (assuming you find them helpful) incorporating your responses in a serious and imaginative reworking/rethinking of your original essay even while you expand it. We will be discussing this process at some length in class. **We can, of course, get together to discuss any assignment (or anything else); just let me know.**

---Drop/Add Deadlines: 2/16 (by Dialbear); 3/12 (but no refunds)---

"You already know enough. So do I. It is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions"---Sven Lindqvist