
Literature of the Shoah

Dr. Miryam Sivan

Course Number: 702.2128
Class Time: Thursday 12-15
Class Location: TBA
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Course Description:

The *Shoah* is a historical fact which continues to baffle, appall, and chide humanity. In this course, we will be reading authors whose work grapples with the multi-faceted implications of this war and its myriad experiences. Some of the authors we will be reading are people who lived through the worst of Europe, 1933-1947. Some will be by children of those who did. And some of the literature we will read has been written by Jews and non-Jews who struggle to fathom the unfathomable, and who are not only keen on 'never forgetting,' but are as frequently intent on trying to place themselves and their generation in relation to this tragedy.

Some of the 'classics' of *Shoah* literature will be on the syllabus. But lesser known works by young European, American, and Israeli authors will also appear. Most of what we read will be prose, but we will also be looking at poetry, non-fiction, and a play.

Course Requirements:

- Weekly Reading Assignments -- posted on Moodle website.
- Biographical Sketches
- Class Participation
 - Weekly Transcription Notes
- Mid-Term Exam (take home: 1500 words)
- Term Paper (BA students: 2000 words, no secondary sources)
(BA Seminar + MA students: 5000 words, research paper)

Final Grade:

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|----------------------------|-----|
| Class Participation & Bios | 5% |
| Transcription Notes | 10% |
| Mid-Term Exam | 35% |
| Final Term Paper | 50% |

Course Requirements Detailed:

*Attendance is mandatory. The University policy allows for a 20% absentee rate. This breaks down to 2.6 classes this semester.

*Lateness is not acceptable and will be noted. Excessive lateness will have a negative effect on the grade.

*Students are expected to come to class prepared. This means they must read the material, as indicated on the accompanying syllabus, and participate in class discussions.

* For each text read, students will be required to hand in **Transcription Notes**. This means you are to choose and write out in their entirety three (3) sentences or paragraphs or verses which you consider especially significant to understanding the work being discussed that week in class. After each quote, free-write about what is important and/or significant about the passage. Do these select passages act as a key to unlocking the meaning of the text? Do they cause a personal reaction, emotionally, intellectually?

These Transcription Notes will not be corrected (for grammar, spelling, etc.) nor will they be graded. But they must be handed in on the day we read the specific text and they constitute 10% of the final grade. Points will be deducted for Notes handed in late or not at all.

Please e-mail the Transcription Notes to me in the body of the mail – not as attachments -- before the start of every class.

* There will be a take home mid-term exam worth 35% of the final grade. It will consist of 2 short essay responses. The mid-term exam will be handed out on Tuesday December 9, 2014. It will be emailed to me as an attachment on Tuesday, December 16, 2014. Late exams will not be accepted.

* There will be final term paper worth 50% of the grade.

BA students: 1800 words, no secondary sources

BA Seminar 5000 words + bibliography

MA students: *Referat* (10-15 pages) OR Seminar Paper (25-30 pages + bibliography)

By the second to last day of class (the penultimate week of the semester, December 30), students are expected to have discussed their thesis statement with me for their final paper. It is mandatory that students receive my approval before they write the full length paper.

Final papers are due no later than Wednesday, January 21, 2015 (BA Seminar and MA *Referat*: Wednesday, February 4, 2015; MA Seminar Papers: March 1, 2015). It is highly recommended that those students who are planning to leave the country immediately after the end of classes hand in their paper on the last day of class or before they leave.

Please send me the final papers as attachments. The file name should be your name.

Course Outline and Reading List

Introduction to Course:

October 21: Historical survey of literary works about the Shoah. Overview of themes related to the field of study: the relationship of aesthetics and ethics; ambivalence about non-survivor 'imagined' texts; Shoah hierarchy; art and trauma; literary progressions from first to second to third generation after historical epoch; where we are now.

Read and discuss poetry by Paul Celan, Dan Pagis, Nellie Sachs.

Original language: Celan – German; Pagis – Hebrew; Sachs – German.

Writers who were 'there':

October 28: "The Hunt," Aharon Appelfeld

"The End" and "The Threshold," Ida Fink

Short stories by two European Jews (who moved to Israel after war) which deal with their characters' worlds at the edge of the cataclysm.

Original language: Appelfeld – Hebrew; Fink – Polish

November 4: *Night*, Elie Wiesel

The novel which helped generate worldwide discussion and knowledge about the deportations and concentration camps. It basically created the genre of the Shoah memoir.

Original language: Yiddish to French

November 11: *This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman*, Tadeusz Borowski

A 'political' Polish prisoner's account of the moral vertigo of the Auschwitz world.

Original language: Polish

November 18: *None of Us Will Return*, Charlotte Delbo

A 'political' French prisoner's account of Auschwitz and the way women banded together to stem the tide of dehumanization.

Original language: French

Women, Madness, and Sexual Abuse:

November 25: "The Woman from Hamburg," Hanna Krall
"The Shawl" and "Rosa," Cynthia Ozick

Two short stories, one by a survivor (Krall) and another by an American old enough and fortunate enough not to have been in Europe (Ozick), about women who became mothers against their will and their tragic relationships to their daughters.

Original language: Krall – Polish; Ozick -- English

December 2: *The Kommandant's Mistress*, Sherri Szeman

A novel which deals directly with sexual slavery in the camps.

Original language: English

Children Lost and Found:

December 9: *Lady of the Castle*, Leah Goldberg

"Purim Night," Edith Pearlman

A play and short story about Jewish children saved from the camps.

Original language: Goldberg – Hebrew; Pearlman – English

MIDTERM HANDED OUT

A Compounded Othering:

December 16: Film: *Bent*, Dir. Sean Mathias

A film written by Martin Sherman based on his play about the persecution of homosexuals in the Third Reich.

Original language: English

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Second Generation:

December 23: "Cattle Car," Thane Rosenbaum

excerpts from *Nightfather*, Carl Friedman

"The Third Generation," Tova Reich

Three stories which deal with the idea of inherited trauma and responsibility.

Original language: Rosenbaum/Reich – English

The Imaginary:

December 30: "Shoes," Etgar Keret

"Tumblers," Nathan Englander

Two imagined stories, a contemporary and a WW2 setting, from two writers who continue to visit this terrain in their work.

Original language: Keret – Hebrew; Englander - English

Thesis statements need to be approved by me.

Second Generation and the marriage of text and image:

January 6: *Maus I and II*, Art Spiegelman

A graphic novel about a son's attempt to understand his life in relation to his parents' Shoah trauma.

Original language: English