

Jewish Studies 230 / Literature in Translation 247 / Slavic 245
REPRESENTING THE HOLOCAUST IN POLAND

Professor: Halina Filipowicz
Office: 1454 Van Hise Hall
Office hours: Tuesdays, 5:30-7:00
Telephone: 262-3498
E-mail: hfilipow@wisc.edu

Course description

“No matter who they are,” writes Doris L. Bergen, a historian of the Holocaust, “people want answers, guidelines, something firm to hold on to in the swirl of disorientation and nausea that is a common reaction to study of the Holocaust. Almost never can history fulfill that desire; the who, what, and how questions that historians can resolve unequivocally turn out to be only the tip of the iceberg of why. Many people leave a historical presentation resolved to turn elsewhere with their big questions - to philosophy, religion, psychology, or literature.”

This course is for students who turn to literature with their questions about the Holocaust, a historical event that still eludes full comprehension.

The purpose of this course is to explore how writers, both Polish and Polish Jewish, have attempted to translate the devastating experience of the Holocaust into words.

Please note: This course is not about the history of the Holocaust. If you are interested in the history of the Holocaust, you may want to read books such as *The Routledge History of the Holocaust* (2011) edited by Jonathan C. Friedman, *History of the Holocaust* (1982) by Yehuda Bauer, or *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1985) by Raul Hilberg.

If you have had little experience doing literary analysis, it is strongly recommended that you take a non-credit mini-course on literary analysis, offered by the Writing Center early in the semester.

Course format

A combination of the instructor’s lectures, class discussions, and students’ presentations.

Course credits

This course is offered for 3 credits only. If you have registered for 4 credits, you will need to drop the fourth credit.

Required books

Jerzy Andrzejewski, *Holy Week*

Michal Glowinski, *The Black Seasons*

Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*

(Please note: In this course, the only acceptable edition of Gross's book is an expanded edition, published by Penguin in 2002.)

Hanna Krall, *The Subtenant; To Outwit God*

Halina Zawadzka, *Living in Fear on the Aryan Side*

Course policy

1. This course is open to eligible students.
2. Students are expected to come to class on time and to stay from the beginning to the end of each class session, participating fully in class discussions. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out from your classmates what was covered in class. Attendance and active participation are vital and count toward the final grade.
3. Required books and handouts should be brought to class to facilitate analysis and interpretation.
4. If you miss an exam, for whatever reason, there will be no make-up exam. You will receive a grade of F for the missed exam.
5. All writing assignments should be submitted in hard copy. Electronic submissions will not be accepted.
6. Late writing assignments will not be accepted. You will receive a grade of F for a writing assignment that was not submitted on the due date.
7. Academic integrity/misconduct: When you use published and/or unpublished sources (e.g., books, articles, Internet materials, classmates' presentations, instructors' lectures and comments), you need to acknowledge these sources in your papers. Failing to acknowledge these sources amounts to plagiarism. Plagiarism will result in a serious penalty: a grade of F for the course.
8. Laptops are allowed for note-taking. All other electronic devices - cell phones, smart phones, etc. - must be turned off during class.
9. Recording lectures and class discussions in this course is not permitted.
10. Eating during class is not permitted.

Requirements and assessment

attendance and active participation: 20%
two exams (six-week and twelve-week): 50%
a short research paper: 10%
a long research paper: 20%

I grade exams on the basis of:

- ** your close familiarity with course material
- ** your ability to synthesize course material and to draw conceptual connections between texts
- ** your use of precise textual detail from assigned readings to support your argumentation (without textual detail, conceptual connections are suspended in a vacuum).

For information how I grade papers, please see the handout “Explicit Grading Criteria.”

Overall, the grading in this course is based on:

- ** your knowledge of the course material
- ** the quality of your research (breadth, depth, originality)
- ** attendance and active participation.

Graduate students who take this course as SL 799 are exempted from the exams. Instead, they will read additional materials of their own choice and write a potentially publishable research paper, due during the finals week. Graduate students who have taken Polish language courses are required to use all primary sources and at least some secondary sources in Polish in their final papers.

A note on Internet research

Not all Internet sources are equally reliable or of equal quality. Some widely available Internet materials such as Wikipedia may be based on incorrect or outdated information. When doing research for writing assignments, please follow these guidelines:

- ** Use the Memorial Library research database. The Memorial Library subscribes to reliable online providers such as JSTOR.
- ** Evaluate the reliability of Internet sources by checking who published them: an organization such as JSTOR or an individual? a reputable press (e.g., a university press) or a “vanity” press? a peer-reviewed scholarly journal or a popular magazine?
- ** Use **at least two secondary sources** and compare how each of them presents a particular

topic or issue.

Research tips are available at: <http://library.wisc.edu/research-tips/>. For more help, contact the Memorial Library's "Ask a Librarian" page: <http://library.wisc.edu/ask/>

Introduction to the course

Adolf Hitler turned Poland into the largest arena for the Holocaust. Poles reacted to the persecution and extermination of Jews in many different ways. Scholars (e.g., Barbara Engelking in her book *Holocaust and Memory: The Experience of the Holocaust and Its Consequences*, originally written in Polish and published in Poland in 1994) have demonstrated that while some Polish men and women were engaged in rescuing Jews, the majority of the Polish people was, for various reasons, indifferent to the fate of their Jewish neighbors; there were also Poles who became, in one way or another, perpetrators. Scholars have also argued that antisemitism was the main reason why there was little solidarity with Jews in Polish society.

The aim of this course is to investigate problems involved in the process of representing the Holocaust through literature and to explore ethical dilemmas surrounding this process.

This course does not examine and assess the **presentation** of facts; rather, it is concerned with the problem of **literary representation**. In other words, it is concerned with the question of how and to what ends the experience of the Holocaust is represented through literary devices and strategies such as metaphor, symbol, allegory, onomatopoeia, intertextual allusion, indirection, equivocation, double voicing, irony, and moments of silence.

To reiterate a point made on p. 1 of the syllabus: this course does not offer a survey of the history of the Holocaust. Instead, it deals with literary analysis.

More specifically, the goal of this course is:

- ** to identify and examine complexity where there appears to be only natural and obvious meaning
- ** to probe areas beneath the surface of events and to read between the lines
- ** to pay close attention to the sounds of words and the rhythms of language

Post-1989 European contexts

At the end of World War II in 1945, there was much that many Europeans wanted to forget. As a result, there was a lot to retrieve from collective amnesia after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the redrawing of the map of Europe, and the admission of new member states to the European Union. This process of challenging and

modifying interpretations of the European past with regard to World War II is still unfolding.

In particular, there has been a growing awareness in the European Union since the 1990s that the memory of the Holocaust is fundamental to European identity, a lesson to remember in order to build a more tolerant and democratic Europe. As might be expected, different countries have responded to this idea in different ways.

For example, the Swedish national self-image has undergone a radical change, largely thanks to the Swedish government's Living History project that was launched in 1997. The goal of this initiative was to reevaluate Sweden's role during the Nazi era and to complicate the often oversimplified image of Sweden as a neutral bystander nation in a Europe torn by war. The Living History project acknowledged, for instance, that Sweden exported iron ore to Nazi Germany, that it allowed German troops to move across its territory, and that it issued "J"-stamped passports to Swedish citizens of Jewish background. The Living History's information campaign has led Sweden to acknowledge its politics of concessions toward Nazi Germany and to accept a shared collective guilt for the Holocaust. As one commentator has remarked, "Judging by the discussion of Sweden's guilt one could get the impression that Sweden had been more Nazi than Nazi Germany itself."

In Poland, the difficult question of shared guilt and moral responsibility with regard to the Holocaust was raised by Jan T. Gross in his book *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, originally written in Polish and published in Poland in 2000. This book triggered a very emotional public debate about the legacy of antisemitic prejudice in Polish society. A firestorm sparked by Gross's subsequent book, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz*, in 2008 was comparable to the heated controversy over *Neighbors*, although this time his critics and opponents attempted to press legal charges against him for allegedly defaming the Polish nation. In both books, Gross asks Poles to examine their self-image as a nation of heroes and victims and their view of World War II as a Polish tragedy of native (i.e., Polish) bravery and foreign betrayal. Gross's challenge to these popular views continues to be a highly contentious and divisive issue in Poland.

Course outline

Please be sure to keep up with reading assignments and to bring the required books and handouts to class.

A note about comparative topics: The goal of comparisons is to bring out not only similarities but also differences.

Week

1 Introduction (Tuesday)
Reading period (Thursday)

2-3 Pre-Holocaust literature

Aleksander Swietochowski: "Chava Ruby" (in *Stranger in Our Midst*; handout) (Tuesday)

Study questions: (1) Describe Chava. Identify at least five traits that characterize her.
(2) How can we explain the fact that the narrator in Swietochowski's short story respects and even admires Chava, but despises her husband, Simcha?
(3) Identify the people who help Chava succeed.
(4) Who is Franek? Compile all the information you can find about him in the short story.

Maria Konopnicka: "Mendel Gdanski" (in *Stranger in Our Midst*; handout) (Thursday)

Study questions: (1) Identify the attackers in this short story.
(2) What precisely does the watchmaker hold against Jews?
(3) Why does Mendel become deeply disillusioned with the Polish community (see p. 235), even though several Poles did try to protect him and his grandson? Is he being ungrateful or unfair?

Summary question: Compare Swietochowski's "Chava Ruby" and Konopnicka's "Mendel Gdanski."

3-4 Controversies over Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*

A short research paper is due on **Thursday, 18 September**.

Reminder: In this course, the only acceptable edition of Gross's book is an expanded edition, published by Penguin in 2002.

Please note: *Neighbors* was originally written and published in Polish in 2000. The translation of *Neighbors* into English, undertaken by the author himself, has resulted in a somewhat different

version of the book. In the English version, Gross has introduced some changes in the structure of his argument and in the amount and kind of detail provided in the main text and in the endnotes. He has also changed the ending (see p. 114).

Study question: Identify and discuss at least three strengths and at least three weakness of Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors*.

Topics for the class lecture: (1) How does Jan T. Gross structure his argument? (2) How does the ending of the English translation of *Neighbors* (see p. 114) differ from the ending of the Polish original? What are the implications of these textual differences?

Research paper: Consult secondary sources and write a short **formal** paper (300-600 words; typed and double-spaced) on the following topics:

1. Explain the meaning of the following terms:

- a. Holocaust (Greek)
- b. Shoah (Hebrew)
- c. Churban (Yiddish)
- d. Final Solution
- e. National Socialist mass murder
- f. Nazi genocide of the Jews
- g. German genocide of the Jews

2. Who invented the term *genocide* and when?

3. Explain when each of the terms came into use. For some terms, it is possible to give a specific year; for other terms, identify a period.

4. Which of the seven terms is, in your opinion, most appropriate to describe the annihilation of the Jewish community in Europe during World War II? Explain why you have chosen a particular term.

Including a bibliography of the sources you have consulted is optional but highly recommended.

However, if you quote sources and use in-text citations, you will need to include a bibliography.

5-6 Representing the Holocaust through poetry

- Tadeusz Różewicz: "The Survivor" (handout)
- Czesław Miłosz: "Campo di Fiori" (handout)
- Wisława Szymborska: "Still" (handout)

Please note: The Warsaw ghetto uprising and the Warsaw uprising are two different uprisings. The former was fought by Jews in 1943; the latter was fought predominantly by non-Jews in 1944.

Please note: The original Polish title of Szymborska's poem, "Jeszcze," does not refer to stillness or motionlessness, but to continuity or a lack of change (i.e., to something that still occurs or persists). In the English translation, the title is ambiguous.

- Study questions:**
- (1) Each of the three poems deals with the Holocaust, but a specific situation is different in each poem. Rózewicz's poem invokes mass executions ("hacked-up bodies"); Milosz's poem takes place during the Warsaw ghetto uprising of 1943; Szymborska's poem is a response to deportations to death camps. How does the speaker (i.e., the poem's lyrical persona or lyrical I) in each poem respond to his/her specific situation? In other words, what linguistic and literary devices does each speaker use? How is each poem structured? What does the speaker's way of speaking reveal about him or her?
 - (2) We expect Holocaust survivors to be dizzy with gratitude for life. And yet some Holocaust survivors are reluctant to speak about their experience or want to remain silent. Why? In Rózewicz's poem, however, the survivor does speak. Why?
 - (3) Regarding Milosz's poem: find biographical information about Giordano Bruno.
 - (4) Regarding Szymborska's poem: Why does the speaker refer to names rather than to persons? How do you understand the title of the poem?
 - (5) How does each of the poems deal with a problem that can be stated thus: to write poetry in an age of propaganda and hate speech is to risk being complicit with a language degraded or prostituted by manipulative, propagandistic agendas?

Summary question: Compare the three poems.

- 7 Representing the Holocaust through the dramatic genre
Ida Fink: "The Table" (handout)

Guidelines for reading a play: Please keep in mind that plays rely heavily on subtext. How a character says something may be as important (revealing) or more important (revealing) than what a character says.

Group presentations addressing the following topics and questions:

- (1) What are the thematic concerns of Ida Fink's play? Identify and discuss at least two thematic concerns.
- (2) Does the form of Fink's play effectively reflect or convey the play's thematic concerns? Does the form of Fink's play weaken, undermine, or sabotage the play's thematic concerns?
- (3) Fill in gaps in the plot of the play and/or provide the background of a particular character and explain that character's motivation for how he or she behaved in a scene.
- (4) Optional: Is the dramatic genre more effective than poetry and prose fiction in helping us

understand the Holocaust experience? Is it less effective? If the dramatic genre is indeed more effective, what, in your opinion, contributes to its effectiveness? If the dramatic genre is less effective, what, in your opinion, causes this problem?

Each group will have 5-10 minutes for its presentation.

7

Six-week exam: Thursday, 16 October

8 Controversies over Hanna Krall's *To Outwit God*
Hanna Krall: *To Outwit God* (in the volume *The Subtenant; To Outwit God*)

Study questions: (1) When Hanna Krall's interview with Marek Edelman was first published in Poland in 1976, many readers protested. Why? When Krall's book was translated into Hebrew and published in Israel in 1982, it sold very poorly. Only several hundred copies were sold. Many people refused to buy the book. Why? To begin to address these questions, it is necessary to explore several other questions. What are typical expectations regarding narratives about a heroic armed resistance such as the Warsaw ghetto uprising? What do we get in *To Outwit God*? What is the point of this particular approach to representing the Warsaw ghetto uprising?
(2) How much does Edelman talk about his work as a cardiologist and about his patients? How much does he talk about his memories of the Warsaw ghetto uprising? What are the implications of this particular textual distribution?
(3) In the interview, Krall is constantly trying to pry information from Edelman, but he often responds with "After all, it doesn't matter [...]. Can't all of you understand that none of it matters anymore?!" (p. 144), or "After all, it doesn't matter at this point" (p. 237), or "And besides, [...] what does it matter? [...] What difference does it make today?" (p. 238). What are we to make of these and other similar statements?
(4) Many American readers of *To Outwit God* have complained that this book lacks structure: the narrative jumps back and forth; it is repetitive, chaotic, and confusing. Is there a way to justify this lack of an orderly or linear structure?

9 The problem of writing a Holocaust memoir (Tuesday)
Michal Glowinski: *The Black Seasons*

Study questions: (1) While living "on the Aryan side," Michal Glowinski witnessed and/or experienced a wide spectrum of Polish reactions to the Nazi persecution and extermination of Jews during World War II. Describe at least 4 Polish reactions he recorded in *The Black Seasons*.

(2) How did Glowinski cope with expressions of hostility by Poles toward Jews? Identify and discuss at least 2 examples. Pay close attention to the words he uses to represent those incidents

in his memoir.

(3) The English title, *The Black Seasons*, is an accurate translation of the Polish title (*Czarne sezony*). But both versions of the title raise many questions: Why seasons rather than, say, years? Why black rather than, say, dark or bleak? Why black rather than bloody? (After all, there is a reference to an “enormous pool of blood” after an execution in the Warsaw ghetto, p.

11.) What are your thoughts about the implications of the title of Glowinski’s book?

9 The problem of writing a Holocaust memoir (Thursday)

Halina Zawadzka: *Living in Fear on the Aryan Side*

Study questions: (1) While living “on the Aryan side,” Halina Zawadzka witnessed and/or experienced a wide spectrum of Polish reactions to the Nazi persecution and extermination of Jews during World War II. Describe at least 4 Polish reactions she recorded in *Living in Fear on the Aryan Side*.

(2) How did Zawadzka cope with expressions of hostility by Poles toward Jews? Identify and discuss at least 2 examples. Pay close attention to the words she uses to represent those incidents in her memoir.

(3) The Polish title of Zawadzka’s book is *Ucieczka z getta* (*Escape from a Ghetto*). Regardless of who (author? translator? editor? publisher?) chose a different title for the American edition, what are the implications of the change from *Escape from a Ghetto* to *Living in Fear on the Aryan Side*?

Summary question: Compare Glowinski’s *The Black Seasons* and Zawadzka’s *Living in Fear on the Aryan Side*.

10 Representing the Holocaust through prose fiction

Jerzy Andrzejewski: *Holy Week*

Study questions: (1) Identify Polish reactions to the Nazi persecution and extermination of Jews that Andrzejewski’s novella reveals.

(2) What are the implications of the recurrent references to Polish suffering under Nazi occupation (see especially pp. 13, 17, 38-39, 65-66)?

(3) What are the implications of the fact that Irena Lilien refuses to barter sexual favors for male protection that may save her from death? In other words: what can she possibly gain by resisting male sexual overtures?

(4) Consider “the curse scene” (pp. 124-25). Why does Irena Lilien curse all Poles, even though Jan and Anna Malecki did attempt to rescue her?

11-12 Representing the Holocaust through prose fiction

Zofia Nalkowska: “The Cemetery Lady,” “By the Railway Track” (handout)

Study questions: (1) “The Cemetery Lady” and “By the Railway Track” are part of Nalkowska’s short story collection entitled *Medallions*. How do you understand the title *Medallions*?

(2) How do you understand the epigraph to *Medallions*: “People dealt this fate to people.” (or, more simply, “People did this to people.”)?

(3) In “By the Railway Track,” identify the person who is the first to find the wounded Jewish woman. Describe that person’s reaction to her.

(4) Who kills the wounded Jewish woman? Why?

Please note: The epigraph to *Medallions* has been the subject of ongoing controversies. In an article published in the journal *Res Publica Nowa* in 2002, Henryk Grynberg, a leading Polish Jewish writer, suggests that a more appropriate epigraph would be: “People dealt this fate to Jews.” In a polemical response to Grynberg, the anthropologist Joanna Tokarska-Bakir (in an article published in *Res Publica Nowa* in 2003) criticizes Grynberg for adopting a Jewish nationalist stance. The literary critic Kinga Dunin (in an article that was published in the journal *Krytyka Polityczna* in 2003 after it was rejected by leading Polish magazines) suggests that a more appropriate epigraph would be: “Poles (in cooperation with Nazis) dealt this fate to Jews.” Ultimately, however, Dunin argues that Nalkowska’s epigraph is crucial because it is eye-opening: “The problem is that Poles murdered human beings. Poles will never become human beings themselves unless they understand this.”

Summary question: Compare the treatment of gender roles and gender relations in Halina Zawadzka’s *Living in Fear on the Aryan Side*, Jerzy Andrzejewski’s *Holy Week*, and Zofia Nalkowska’s “By the Railway Track.”

12

Twelve-week exam: Thursday, 20 November

13

Individual conferences by appointment to discuss drafts of the final paper (Tuesday)

Thanksgiving recess (Thursday)

14-15

Individual conferences by appointment to discuss drafts of the final paper (Tuesdays and Thursdays)

Final paper (a long research paper) is due in my office (1454 Van Hise Hall) on or before **Friday, 19 December, 5:00 p.m.**

Please note: Only papers submitted in hard copy will be accepted.

There is no final exam in this course.

Final paper

The final paper should be in the form of a formal essay. It should be typed with double spacing. It should have a title, logical organization, smooth prose, correct grammar and spelling, and page numbers.

The topic of the paper is your choice.

The paper should engage issues that have been discussed in class, while enabling you to broaden and/or deepen your understanding of these issues.

Your research for the paper should cover both primary and secondary sources.

Novels, short stories, plays, poems, literary essays, diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies count as primary sources. They are called “primary” because they need to be contextualized and analyzed through secondary sources.

Secondary sources are scholarly books and articles that provide historical material and theoretical/conceptual tools, enabling you to contextualize and analyze your primary sources.

Please be sure to use at least two secondary sources (books and/or articles) and to integrate them into your analysis and interpretation of primary sources.

Your bibliography should list all the primary and secondary sources that you have used. For the bibliography, use a standard format (see MLA, Chicago, or social sciences guidebooks to documenting sources).

The length of the paper should be 1,800-2,400 words. This word count includes a bibliography.

Your paper should have a title and a solid thesis statement. To formulate a thesis, you need to be explicit and precise, for example, “In this paper, I want to test a hypothesis that ...,” or “In this paper, I want to explore the idea that ...,” or “In this paper, I propose to demonstrate that ...,” or “In this paper, I will argue that”

Your thesis statement should be followed by a sentence introducing your textual evidence, for example, “My textual evidence comes primarily from Jerzy Andrzejewski’s *Holy Week* and Ida Fink’s *The Journey*, but I will also draw on Zofia Nalkowska’s ‘By the Railway Track,’” or “My discussion is based mainly on Hanna Krall’s *To Outwit God*; my additional evidence comes from Krall’s *The Subtenant*.”

As a general rule, authors of effective papers:

- ** clearly state a thesis (problem, idea, or question) to be investigated
- ** introduce evidence

- ** analyze and interpret the evidence to develop a well-structured argument that will prove or defend the thesis
- ** seamlessly integrate primary and secondary sources while developing an argument
- ** treat each important point thoroughly before moving on to the next main point
- ** use the conclusion either to recapitulate everything that has gone before in the essay, or to offer the logical culmination of the argument.

Reminder: Only papers submitted in hard copy will be accepted.