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SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE DARKNESS

A Guide to Teaching the Holocaust

Edited by

Nancy A. Lauckner and
Miriam Jokiniemi



Berghahn Books

NEW YORK • OXFORD

Published in 2000 by

Berghahn Books

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Shedding light on the darkness : a guide to teaching the Holocaust / edited by Nancy A.
Lauckner, Miriam Jokiniemi.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 1-57181-208-3 (alk. paper)

1. Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Study and teaching (Higher)--United States. 2.
Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Study and teaching (Higher)--Canada. I. Lauckner,
Nancy Ann, 1941- II. Jokiniemi, Miriam.

D804.33 .S54 2000

940.53'18'071173--dc21

00-027751

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed in the United States on acid-free paper.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In a cooperative project of this kind, there are always many people to thank for their help in making it possible. First of all, we extend our sincere gratitude to our contributors, whose work it is our pleasure to showcase in this volume and without whose essays the book would not exist. They all worked very hard to produce the essays, undertook the requested revisions cheerfully and in a spirit of cooperation, and willingly and promptly answered the multitude of detailed questions the editors asked in the process of completing the manuscript. The opportunity to develop good working relationships and even friendships with some of the most outstanding Germanists and German Studies specialists teaching the Holocaust in North American colleges and universities was a most rewarding “fringe benefit” of our work on this project, and it has been a great joy to see these essays on their ingenious courses blossom into a volume which exceeds our expectations and which, we believe, represents a significant contribution to Holocaust pedagogy in our profession.

Further, we thank Professors Irene Kacandes of Dartmouth College and Karin Doerr of Concordia University for their offer to help in various ways. We extend our sincere appreciation to James Hammons (formerly of the University of Tennessee Library, but now at Ball State University), Ulla Habekost of the Goethe Institute Toronto, and Irene Tencinger of the Faculty of Information Studies at the University of Toronto for their unstinting efforts in checking bibliographical details; and to William Ward of the University of Tennessee Library, Kathryn Elder of York University Libraries, Professor Gary Evans of the University of Ottawa, Andrés Abril and the Film and Video Department of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and many others for their invaluable assistance in providing information on film and video desiderata.

We express our gratitude to Professors Scott Denham (Davidson College), Thomas Fox (University of Alabama), Sander Gilman (University of

Chicago), Patricia Herminhouse (University of Rochester), and Herbert Lindenberger (Stanford University), as well as to several of our contributors, for their advice and suggestions on publishers to contact. We also thank everyone who read all or part of our manuscript for their helpful comments. And, of course, we offer our sincere appreciation to Dr. Marion Berghahn for publishing this volume, to general editor Professor Gerald Kleinfeld for including it in the Modern German Studies series, to Shawn Kendrick and Christine Marciniak for their excellent copyediting and typesetting respectively, and to the staff members of Berghahn Books for their outstanding work in preparing the book to go to press.

We thank the colleagues at the University of Tennessee and York University who aided us with advice and support through the many stages of this project: Professors Carolyn R. Hodges, Peter Höyng, David Lee, Chauncey J. Mellor, Stefanie Ohnesorg, Gilya Schmidt, and Olga Welch of the University of Tennessee; Meredith Morris-Babb, previously, and Joyce Harrison, currently, of the University of Tennessee Press; Professors Ellen Anderson, David Johnson, Mark Webber, and Ronald Webster of York University; and Professor Michael Brown of the York University Centre for Jewish Studies. Further, we thank Saskia Zeegen and professional indexer Barbara Schon of Toronto for their invaluable work in preparing the Index, and Professor Margy Gerber of Bowling Green State University for her counsel at various stages. Finally, we express our deep appreciation to Charles Timothy Wiebe and Dr. Stephen W. Kercel for their helpful advice and support in their areas of specialization.

INTRODUCTION

This volume of essays on Holocaust teaching by North American Germanists marks the realization of an idea that we, its editors, began discussing in October 1994. As professors of German who had long been interested and involved in teaching and research about the Holocaust in our discipline, we knew that there were significant gaps in the scholarly resources on the Holocaust available to Germanists. Despite the outstanding and prolific Holocaust research that has been published over the years and continues to appear regularly, one area is markedly underrepresented: that of Holocaust pedagogy, especially as it relates to the fields of German and German Studies. Some scholars have presented conference papers and written journal articles on the topic, but generally these have been isolated studies. We recognized the need for a book that would collect essays by Germanists active in Holocaust teaching that would describe and discuss their Holocaust-related courses.

At the outset, two definitions are in order. The term “Holocaust,” in its strictest sense, has long referred to the Nazi program of persecution, ghettoization, incarceration in concentration camps, and attempted annihilation of the Jewish population of Europe and the Soviet Union on the basis of “race.” Contemporary historical research has now broadened our understanding of the term to include the genocide against the Roma and Sinti and the “euthanasia” of the physically and mentally impaired, the latter program of which ended officially in 1941 due to the bishops’ protest and domestic outcry. Members of other population groups (Slavs, Communists, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, etc.) also suffered persecution, imprisonment, and murder or death at the hands of the Nazis, so their fate, too, figures in Holocaust research.

In their Holocaust-related German and German Studies courses, the contributors to this volume focus on the Jews as the primary victims of the Holocaust in terms of numbers and as the central targets of Nazi racial

policy, although some contributors also treat other victims in class discussions as well as in readings or films. This focus reflects the practice in our discipline in such courses and the far greater availability of literary works and films on the Jews. Recognizing that the Nazi-originated and administered Holocaust affected all Jews under the Nazi sphere of influence, our contributors do not limit their attention to German Jews in these courses. While some of the courses study the perpetrators as well, many contributors do so only indirectly by discussing perpetrators who appear as characters in the literary works and films chosen. The proportion correctly represents the small percentage of Holocaust-related courses in German and German Studies that specifically treat the perpetrators.

The second definition needed is that of “German Studies.” The paradigm shift from Germanistics to German Studies began in the mid-1980s and has become a strong trend in our discipline. The field expands the range of traditional German offerings and attracts more students by introducing courses with cultural and often historical content; thus courses related to the Holocaust are often found in a German Studies curriculum. At some institutions German Studies programs are truly interdisciplinary, involving the cooperation of faculty in German, history, cultural studies, film, and other areas of study, and providing a curriculum taught by faculty members from these areas. The field is also found in many colleges and universities, however, in which German departments and programs have changed their designation to “German Studies” and the German faculty, having broadened its area of expertise, teaches most or all of the German Studies courses itself. Both variants characterize the field of German Studies in the U.S. and Canada. In addition, many traditional German departments and programs that have not changed their name now teach many courses of the German Studies type. Recognizing the significance of the German Studies trend, the German government has established a number of North American centers to support teaching and research in the field: at Berkeley, Brandeis, Georgetown, Harvard, and the University of Wisconsin (Madison) and its teammate, the University of Minnesota, in the U.S.; and at York and its partner, the Université de Montréal, in Canada.

There are several important reasons why this long-needed book is especially valuable at this time. First, the strong current trend in our profession to replace traditional Germanistics programs in Canada and the U.S. with those in German Studies makes Holocaust courses an appropriate and essential component of these new curricula to complement and to enhance students’ understanding of German literature, culture, and history. Therefore, the growing numbers of Germanists and German

Studies specialists who will both want and be expected to teach the Holocaust in the years ahead will need the resources and guidance that a book such as this can provide.

Second, disciplinary boundaries in the U.S. and Canada are more open than those in Europe, where historians teach the Holocaust and Germanists seldom have the opportunity. In North America, though, as explained above, Germanists do teach Holocaust-related courses in both German and German Studies. As we, a U.S. Germanist and a Canadian Germanist, formulated and discussed our plans for this volume, we quickly recognized that the North American environment in which we work represents an important element in our Holocaust teaching that both requires and deserves exploration which it has not thus far received. The circumstances we face, our students' preparation and expectations, our own educational backgrounds, the requirements of our institutions: all this creates radically different conditions for teaching the Holocaust than those confronting our colleagues in German-speaking countries. These advantages and disadvantages intrinsic to the North American context call for pedagogical approaches to Holocaust teaching that may differ considerably from those that such colleagues can use effectively. The contributors to this volume address both the benefits and problems inherent in teaching this subject as North American Germanists and demonstrate ways to meet the challenge based on their own classroom experience.

Third, because the time is inexorably approaching when all the Holocaust survivors still alive today will have died, it is important to look to that future and the particular circumstances in which it will place Holocaust teaching. When we lose the last people who personally experienced the Holocaust, we will no longer have in our classrooms their direct individual testimony that has brought the Holocaust home to our students with a vividness that nothing else can approach. It is very likely that revisionists will take advantage of this situation and that there will be a surge in Holocaust denial. Thus it is extremely important that there be ongoing, high-quality Holocaust teaching in the future, both to counter the deniers and to teach future generations about the Holocaust without the direct personal testimony of the survivors. We believe that Germanists and German Studies professors have a special obligation to be active in Holocaust teaching because of the historical responsibility for the Holocaust of the people whose language, literature, history, and culture they teach. This conviction, stated in the invitation to our contributors, has guided our project since its inception. We hope that this volume will serve our colleagues well by providing ideas, resources, and methods for their teaching in this challenging future.

Germanists, then, in traditional German programs and in German Studies departments, are the intended audience for which we have prepared this book that focuses on the teaching of the Holocaust within their discipline. It addresses neither Holocaust Studies nor Jewish Studies, yet we anticipate that readers from the various areas involved may find our contributors' essays and courses interesting and thought-provoking. Further, this volume is not meant for historians, who will find it quite different in focus, nature, structure, and documentation system from the practices that pertain in their own field. Our contributors have chosen readings, films, and assignments based on the approaches and methods of our discipline and their own goals for their particular students and classes, which differ from those that guide historians in creating their courses. We, of course, welcome historians who, cognizant of these differences, choose to read our book.

The essay contributors to this volume are Germanists in German and German Studies who have been teaching about the Holocaust for some time and have developed creative courses that provide Holocaust instruction to North American students. In selecting the people whom we wished to invite to participate in our project, we had several objectives. We wanted colleagues who would provide well-written scholarly essays containing valuable insights into Holocaust teaching on the basis of their own experience with a specific course or courses, but we were also looking for an interesting variety in the kinds of courses described and in the types of institutions where they are taught. Further, we sought both colleagues who teach in the U.S. and those who teach in Canada because of the North American concept of our volume. We developed a list of potential contributors by drawing on our own knowledge of Germanists teaching the Holocaust in our respective countries, on our awareness of their Holocaust-related scholarship in some cases and on bibliographies in others, and on colleagues who suggested other active Holocaust scholars whom we might wish to contact. In February 1996 we invited twenty-five people from this list to consider joining our project, and seventeen accepted promptly. We also extended an invitation to one colleague who had heard about the project and indicated great interest in participating, should we like another contributor. The volume now contains sixteen essays. Five of the authors are from Canada, and the remaining eleven from the U.S. The number of Canadian essay contributors is both adequate and representative, given the relatively small cohort of Canadian Germanists in comparison to the far larger one in the United States and given the correspondingly smaller proportions of Germanists in the two countries who engage in Holocaust teaching.

In addition to a focus on quality, our goal in selecting, editing, and organizing these essays has been to enhance the volume's representative nature and usefulness. The courses described run the gamut from intermediate language and literature offerings to advanced undergraduate and graduate courses. They are taught in institutions ranging from small private liberal arts colleges to large public universities in both countries, usually in a regular term, but in one case in a summer program and in another in a mini-term. With one exception, all the courses treated in detail here were taught under a German, foreign language, or German Studies rubric.

The abstracts that we received early in this project and the essays submitted later described a wide variety of Holocaust-related courses, as we had hoped, yet often both the courses and the manner in which the contributors discussed them were inventive beyond our anticipation. We reconsidered our intention to use essays only on courses in which the Holocaust was either the sole topic or a central aspect when the abstracts demonstrated that some of our contributors did not teach courses of this kind, yet they did teach about the Holocaust. The courses their abstracts described were of two types: (1) some were fairly standard undergraduate offerings (second-year German, third-year conversation and composition, and the like) to which the contributors had added a small but significant and often very creative, Holocaust component; (2) others were developed by colleagues who registered their philosophical opposition to teaching courses focusing solely or principally on the Holocaust, yet who had devised courses on other topics in which the Holocaust was an ongoing concern. Recognizing that the courses these contributors taught demonstrated important aspects of the Holocaust teaching being done by North American Germanists without which our book would be incomplete and unrepresentative, we expanded our volume to include two parts. The essays in Part I discuss courses in which the Holocaust is the sole or a central focus, while those in the smaller Part II, which are generally somewhat shorter, treat courses of the two different types outlined above.

Two of our contributors endured the Holocaust years in Europe, came to North America after the war, and became Germanists at U.S. institutions. Among their interests in teaching and scholarship has been the discussion of Holocaust-related matters, based both on scholarly sources and their personal experience. Susan E. Cernyak-Spatz of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte has contributed the essay "The Well-Utilized Survivor," in which she describes her course for undergraduates that treats Holocaust history, literature, and film. Spared the worst of the Holocaust, Lauren Nussbaum of Portland State University writes about

a very different kind of course in “Witness Grete Weil: An Intensive Summer Graduate Seminar.” This course on a single author whose oeuvre is marked by the Holocaust serves as an example of one means of providing students exacting and meaningful academic work on German literature of the Holocaust when little time is available. Although both Cernyak-Spatz and Nussbaum have ostensibly “retired,” they continue to teach and write about the Holocaust or literature depicting it. Their contributions to this volume are valuable not only as descriptions of their own courses, but also as indications of what two individuals who survived the Holocaust era consider essential elements that Germanists must teach North American students about this dark chapter in human history.

In “The Holocaust through Literature and Film,” David Scrase of the University of Vermont discusses his English-language course on Holocaust literature and film, which he developed as a needed complement to his university’s history offerings on the Holocaust. This course serves a wide undergraduate audience both inside and outside his department. Although most of the contributors to this volume use films in their Holocaust courses, his course and that of Nancy M. Decker of Rollins College utilize this medium most extensively. Decker’s essay, “Inserting a Short Course on the Holocaust into German Offerings at a Small Liberal Arts College,” will be of interest to readers for several reasons: it describes a mini-term course on the Holocaust and thus, like Nussbaum’s essay, presents a way of teaching a meaningful Holocaust course when limited time is available; it shows how one can begin teaching the Holocaust on a small scale initially outside the regular curriculum; and it draws heavily on World Wide Web resources that have begun to be essential for Holocaust teaching.

Besides Nussbaum, two other contributors in Part I offer essays on literature courses on the Holocaust taught in German and with all or virtually all readings in German. In his “Four Genres and One Question: Why?” Steven R. Cerf of Bowdoin College discusses his undergraduate seminar, which introduces advanced German majors and minors to Holocaust literature in German by systematically utilizing a genre-based approach as well as including art, music, and film. Nancy A. Lauckner of the University of Tennessee treats “A Graduate Seminar on the Holocaust and the Third Reich As Reflected in Postwar German Literature” and describes the challenges of teaching German Holocaust literature to students in a small German graduate program at a Southern university.

In addition to Scrase, three other contributors discuss undergraduate courses on Holocaust literature taught in English with readings in English. In her essay on “The Holocaust and Resistance in German Litera-

ture,” Gisela Brude-Firnau of the University of Waterloo describes her course of the same title in which she uses German literature in English translation to explore the issue of resistance in the literary depiction of the Holocaust. Thomas Freeman of Beloit College writes in “Victims and Perpetrators: The Many Voices of the Holocaust” about his English-language course, which accommodates students with some knowledge of German and those with none, while providing a fourth hour of German instruction each week for those who do some readings in German. His essay also discusses the version of his course in which German is the language of instruction and of all the readings. From the University of Illinois at Chicago, Dagmar C. G. Lorenz contributes “The Difficulty of Breaking the Silence: Teaching the Holocaust in a Program of German Literature and Culture,” in which she discusses frankly her difficulties in introducing and gaining acceptance for a Holocaust course in one of the largest German programs in the U.S. at Ohio State University. Lorenz offers an important historical perspective on Holocaust teaching in the North American context as differentiated from the situation that obtains in Germany and describes her quarter-length course which focused on the Holocaust in literature and film.

Three of the Part I essays present courses that treat the Holocaust from the standpoint of cultural studies. In “Teaching the Shoah in Context: A Course on Jewish German Relations,” Karen Remmler provides insight into the rewards and challenges of teaching the Holocaust to diverse audiences by contrasting her experiences in teaching a similar course in English to a largely Jewish class of non-German majors at Amherst College and in German to a primarily non-Jewish group of German majors at Mount Holyoke College. In “German Myths and Jewish Traumas: Teaching Postwar Cultural History 1945–1995,” Florentine Strzelczyk of the University of Calgary describes a course she taught at Queen’s University. Strzelczyk’s essay, which offers essential theoretical and pedagogical considerations for teaching the Holocaust within German cultural history as well as ideas for incorporating the Canadian context in doing so, will be of particular interest to colleagues just getting started in Holocaust teaching, because in it the author discusses a number of Holocaust-related units and subunits that are easily transposable into a variety of courses and that will spark the readers’ own ingenuity. Similarly, “Designing within and around Limits: The Holocaust, Madonna, and Me,” by Linda Feldman of the University of Windsor, will be very helpful to colleagues embarking on Holocaust teaching, because it offers practical advice on developing a course that meets students’ needs and that deals effectively and creatively with the opportunities and

limits of the local context. Feldman's use of cultural and literary "micro-texts" and her four modules provide methods that readers can readily adapt to their own situations.

Although there are fewer essays in Part II, they demonstrate on a smaller scale as much variety as those in Part I. William Collins Donahue of Rutgers University complements Strzelczyk's pedagogical focus in his "Beyond Cultural Literacy: 'Interactive Autobiography' as Holocaust Pedagogy." Here he describes a Holocaust unit that he incorporated into his third-year Autobiography and Culture course and in which he effectively utilized a class visit by a Holocaust survivor to expose his students to essential information about the Holocaust in a way that caught their interest, while simultaneously developing their skills in listening to, speaking, reading, and writing German. Karin Doerr of Concordia University discusses in "The Nazi Period, the Holocaust, and German-Jewish Issues as Integral Subjects in a German Language Course" the methods by which she introduces information and supplementary materials on these topics into her intermediate-level, two-semester German Composition and Conversation course. Readers who teach such courses will find her methods useful in expanding the traditional subject matter, informing their students about Germany's past and present, and sensitizing students to threats to a civil society. In "The Holocaust in an Introductory German Literature Course: Problematic Responses as a Catalyst for Curricular Change," her compatriot Miriam Jokiniemi of York University explains how some disturbing student responses to the Holocaust in regard to both literature and current events served as the impetus for her reevaluation of her second-year literature course. By redesigning the course to treat diversity and universality, Jokiniemi developed a unit that has enabled her to teach German Holocaust literature successfully in a section on alterity and Otherness.

Finally, in "The Teaching (and Not Teaching) of 'the Disaster,'" Leslie Morris of the University of Minnesota describes two courses she taught at Bard College, one on postwar German literature in translation called History, Memory, Narrative, and the other a comparative literature course entitled Poetry of Place/Poetry of Exile. Though neither course focused on the Holocaust or offered a Holocaust unit as such, both emphasized considerations essential for students and teachers of the Holocaust: its basic unrepresentability and the concepts of displacement, exile, and borders. Readers of this provocative essay not only will think of new ideas for their own courses of this kind, but also will realize that all the contributors to this volume are succeeding in the vital task Morris articulates, that is, "teaching what cannot be taught."

We have chosen the method and structure of a three-part “package” for the essay contributions to this volume, because this approach is especially appropriate and useful for our target audience of Germanists in German and German Studies. Each contributor presents an essay, the first component of each package, describing a Holocaust-related course or courses that he or she has taught. In these essays each author explains his or her philosophy of Holocaust teaching; indicates what works were selected and why; discusses the kinds of assignments and class activities used, and student response to the various components of the course; describes what aspects of the course worked effectively and why, and which proved problematic and why; and comments on what changes he or she would make in the course in the future. The essay format thus offers the reader detailed and extensive information about the development and teaching of each course described, information that is of vital interest and importance to any Germanist who may wish to adapt one of these courses or some of the insights in the essays for his or her own classes. The essays are not intended to portray ideal or perfect courses, but rather to provide sixteen varied visions of effective German and German Studies courses that involve the Holocaust.

A second component of each package is the syllabus for the course discussed in the essay. Each contributor has provided the syllabus that he or she used, in accordance with our purpose of presenting actual courses and the syllabi that worked for the professors who taught these courses.¹ Most of the syllabi have been adapted for this volume by omitting nonessential matters of purely local concern (instructors’ office hours, locations, etc.) and by making other adjustments to use the space most efficiently. We have also changed the arrangement by date (month and day), which many of the syllabi originally contained, to a week-by-week or day-by-day method. This method eliminates extraneous dates and shows clearly how much time is devoted to a particular discussion or work. Thus readers can see at a glance the duration and the order of each item used in the syllabus, both of which are essential considerations for colleagues seeking ideas for constructing courses of their own. The syllabi are intended as basic course overviews that complement the extensive discussions and explanations provided in the essays. Further, the syllabi enable readers of this volume to skim each course quickly in order to determine which essays may prove most pertinent to their needs, and readers interested in developing or revising their own Holocaust-related courses may choose to adapt one or more of the syllabi or parts of them.

The list of works cited after each syllabus, together with the parenthetical notes in the essay text and any explanatory notes needed, is the

remaining component of each essay package. These lists are not to be construed as lists of recommended readings. Rather, each contributor's list contains all print, film, and electronic works mentioned, quoted, or paraphrased in his or her essay and used in his or her syllabus. We have used MLA documentation style for our volume because it is the standard for scholarship in language and literature and thus is both familiar to and well understood by our intended readers. The notes and each list of works cited provide the documentation and scholarly apparatus required by the MLA system. Further, each list serves the important additional function of giving the reader an alphabetized and easily accessible reference file of the works used by the individual contributor to prepare his or her course and essay.

While the procedure of presenting essay packages makes our volume both especially useful and easily usable for its intended readership in the ways just discussed, the method does have a disadvantage which readers should note. It can sometimes call attention to a literary, film, or cultural work not because of its quality, but rather because of its highly touted publication or release and its consequent ubiquity in scholarly or popular discourse on the Holocaust at the time the courses were being taught or the essays written. This is the case with the frequent references to Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996), which came under severe attack in the scholarly debate unleashed by the book's publication. Students in courses at the time this book was published of course came to class talking about it. Our contributors and their students have followed the debate, and some colleagues will use the book as a means of teaching critical thinking when they next offer their course. In that context they will discuss the debate with their students. We would strongly recommend that anyone who takes this approach should expose students to Browning's *Ordinary Men* (1992; reissued 1998), an excellent and widely accepted treatment of the subject that both he and Goldhagen address. Robert R. Shandley's edited volume *Unwilling Germans? The Goldhagen Debate* (1998) provides useful material by compiling various opinions on this scholarly controversy.

To serve our primary audience, Germanists in German and German Studies, yet to make our volume accessible to others who may wish to read it, the editors have developed a translation policy. Thus, English translations of any long German quotations (of approximately sentence length or more) in these essays appear in the notes, but we translate neither most individual German words and phrases nor the syllabi of the courses offered in German with German readings. We reason that the vocabulary of these words and phrases, many of which are historical in nature, should

be familiar to anyone who teaches or intends to teach a Holocaust course, and that any colleague who wishes to develop Holocaust courses taught in German with German readings must be sufficiently proficient in German to understand untranslated syllabi of such courses.²

For our volume, Ronald Webster, a German historian at York University, has graciously prepared a list of important historical readings on the Holocaust and the Nazi era. Located after the essay contributions, his list contains major works reflecting the latest and most widely accepted standard of historical scholarship, as well as works that are important for other reasons, such as their impact. He has provided this list for our readers to guide Germanists who wish to acquire historical background in preparation for teaching a Holocaust-related course as well as to help experienced teachers who want to expand the historical knowledge they already have on this period in order to revise an existing course or introduce a new one. The works he has listed will also be useful as sources of historical readings for students in German and German Studies courses related to the Holocaust.

When one undertakes to teach the Holocaust, there are certain basic guidelines to consider in order to achieve the most effective conditions for teaching the subject. Although careful preparation is important for every course, this element is especially crucial when one wishes to teach the Holocaust. It is essential that the instructor be well grounded in the historical facts and issues related to the Holocaust in order to be able to present it to his or her students in context. The most efficient way to gain the needed knowledge would be to enroll in a course or courses on the Holocaust and its era offered in History or Holocaust Studies departments, yet often professors find it difficult to engage in formal classroom studies once they are employed. However, they can educate themselves about the Holocaust through reading and research. In addition, there are numerous Holocaust centers and museums, summer programs offered by universities and other research institutions, many conferences and workshops on the Holocaust, and now much information available from electronic sources, so there is ample opportunity to gain the necessary historical background.

Further, if a German or German Studies professor teaches a Holocaust-related course and his or her institution offers a Holocaust or Third Reich course in history or Holocaust Studies, it would be wise to recommend that students take the latter course before enrolling in the German or German Studies course. This approach would give students the needed historical context for studying the Holocaust and might mitigate the problem that students sometimes react overly emotionally to literature

and cultural documents related to the Holocaust. Many of our contributors decry their students' lack of historical knowledge; if students entered their classes well versed on Holocaust history, the professors could devote their class sessions to teaching the actual course content instead of having to allocate time to provide students with historical background information.

The above guidelines are offered as recommendations, not prescriptions. The conditions mentioned, particularly the availability of history and Holocaust Studies courses on the Holocaust and Third Reich, are not present at every institution. The Holocaust is far too important a subject—and the consequences of not teaching it potentially far too devastating—to deny German and German Studies professors the right and the opportunity to teach their Holocaust courses if their students cannot take or have not yet studied history courses on the Holocaust. The volume's editors view all Holocaust-related courses as "Holocaust courses," whether they focus on Holocaust literature, film, cultural history, art, music, or other aspects of the Holocaust. Further, we contend that because German and German Studies professors are well grounded in the language, literature, culture, and history of the country and people from which the Holocaust originated, they offer an essential context and perspective to students in their Holocaust courses. The essays in this volume present courses that provide an appropriate context and illustrate the outstanding contribution of North American Germanists and German Studies professors to Holocaust teaching.

We and our contributors share the sincere hope that this volume will support and promote the teaching of the Holocaust by North American scholars of German and German Studies in the challenging years ahead. The courses developed and described by our authors will, we believe, spark unique and creative variations by colleagues already experienced in Holocaust teaching who are seeking new ideas to enable them to modify and revise their existing courses or to design new ones, as well as provide support for those scholars who are venturing into Holocaust teaching for the first time, either because of their own convictions of its importance or because of a departmental assignment. We realize that some colleagues never treat the Holocaust in their courses because they feel insecure about approaching a daunting subject of such historical and human magnitude, especially if their own graduate education included no instruction on the Holocaust; we trust that their exposure to this volume and the assistance it offers will give them the confidence and courage they need to embark on Holocaust teaching. Thus, we see ourselves, our contributors, and our readers as partners in the challenging yet crucial undertaking of

providing meaningful instruction on the Holocaust in German and German Studies programs of North American colleges and universities. It is our hope that by “shedding light on the darkness” we may contribute to fulfilling the moral obligation incumbent upon our discipline and that by teaching new generations about the Holocaust we will be honoring the memory of its victims.

Nancy A. Lauckner

Notes

1. In the case of essays in which a contributor discusses more than one course, we asked the author to provide a syllabus for only one of the courses treated. If readers would like to obtain a syllabus for one of the courses for which none is reproduced here, they should contact the professor who taught the course in question. The list of contributors includes authors' affiliations.
2. Readers should also note another convention established for this volume: contributors who provide parenthetical dates after titles of translated works refer to the date of first publication or release in the original language, usually German.

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PART I

Chapter 1

THE HOLOCAUST THROUGH LITERATURE AND FILM

David Scrase

In view of the fact that Vermont is a predominantly rural state with a population less than one percent Jewish and that it lacks both noticeable ethnic divisions and any concomitant and significant history of racism or genocide, Vermont's state university began teaching the Holocaust rather early. It offered a course in the mid-1960s entitled Assimilation—Holocaust—Israel, and in the fall semester of 1978, a course devoted *entirely* to the Holocaust. The instructor for the former was Professor Raul Hilberg, who had come to Vermont in 1956 and wrote the bulk of his monumental work *The Destruction of the European Jews* while at the University of Vermont. Hilberg and Samuel Bogorad, a professor of English, taught the latter course.

For a number of years they continued to teach this Holocaust course as, essentially, a history and literature course located in the Department of Political Science. Hilberg dealt with the historical facts and data; Bogorad approached the subject through works of literature. They continued to offer this course, which was immensely popular, on a regular basis until Bogorad retired in 1985. At this point, Hilberg began to teach a course that spent the whole semester laying forth the facts of the Holocaust.

Aware that a gap needed to be filled, I then began to offer in the Department of German and Russian, on a more or less regular basis, a course in English called *Hitler and After*, which, we hoped, would raise our enrollments a little. *Hitler and After* treated works of German-

language provenance in English translation. It was, therefore, limited to whatever was available. Books such as Brecht's *The Jewish Wife and Other Short Plays*, which contains three selections from *The Private Life of the Master Race* (Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches, 1938), and Günter Grass's *Cat and Mouse* remained readily available, as they still do. Jurek Becker's *Jacob the Liar* was quickly out of print for a while, however, soon to be followed by Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy* and Peter Weiss's *The Investigation*, and the course became steadily less viable.

Meanwhile, in 1991, Raul Hilberg retired. The university held a three-day symposium, with six papers given by some of the world's preeminent scholars of the Holocaust, to celebrate the retirement of a man many consider the doyen of Holocaust scholars. The Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Howard Ball, preferred to see the occasion less as the end of an era than as the beginning of a new one, an era in which a Holocaust course would not depend on the presence of someone who just happened to be qualified to teach it, but would be an integral part of a regular program of Holocaust Studies. This program has now been established. The Department of History has reserved a slot for a Holocaust historian, and this person teaches a survey course once a year, as well as smaller Holocaust-related seminars at the senior and graduate levels. Meanwhile I have developed a course on the literature and film of the Holocaust, which is directed at a general undergraduate audience and which incorporates works in English by European and American authors, not just works by German-language writers. Given the material, the course would be offered at many institutions under the rubric of German Studies or German. At the University of Vermont, however, all courses containing foreign literature read and discussed in English are designated "General Literature." This is the course I will describe in this essay.

One of the tenets of the earlier, all-German literature course had been *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past)—inevitably so, in view of the amount of literature devoted to this theme in the postwar period, and the dominance of this tenet over the decades since 1945 to the present. With regard to the Holocaust, there is, of course, the general educational goal: to learn from history and the mistakes of the past. But the categorization of the participants into victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and both rescuers and resisters, is also pertinent. Since the students who take my course have not always taken the History of the Holocaust survey course, I find it necessary to provide some historical background.

Fortunately, I have at my disposal a textbook which the Center for Holocaust Studies at the University of Vermont compiled specifically as

an introduction to the subject. *The Holocaust: Introductory Essays* contains three sections. The first, devoted to the facts, is entitled the “History of the Holocaust.” Its five chapters deal with the “Emergence of Modern Antisemitism,” “The Rise of the Nazis to Power,” “Nazi Persecution in Germany and Austria,” the “Final Solution,” and “Rescue and Resistance.” This section provides the essential background for the students as they read the literature and view the films. Although the literature and films duplicate much of the material in the textbook, this is good rather than bad, for the students more readily learn repeated facts. The movie *The Longest Hatred* (1991), for example, duplicates, reinforces, and underscores the material in the chapter on antisemitism.

The course begins with some introductory remarks and information and a showing of Alain Resnais’s short film *Night and Fog* (1955). By showing this film in the first class, I expose the students to almost everything that is yet to come: the rise of the Nazis, the persecution of the Jews (although the word “Jew” itself does not appear in the film, which does not specifically show the victims of the Nazis to be Jews), the roundups and deportations, the camps and annihilations, and the question of guilt. The discussion of the film (which usually takes place at the following meeting, since the harrowing images at the end of the film leave most students speechless) centers on such questions as the historical progression of events and the deeper argument of functionalist versus intentionalist theories, on questions of cinematographic devices such as camera angle, on the uses and limitations of documentary material, and on Resnais and writer Jean Cayrol’s left-wing political agenda. The meaning and history of the term “Nacht und Nebel” is essential in this regard.

Having used *Night and Fog* to outline the progression of the Holocaust and set the scene for the semester’s viewing and reading, the course now examines the rise of the Nazis in Germany and uses three sources to do so. Robert Bernheim portrays the historical facts well in the textbook *The Holocaust: Introductory Essays* in his chapter entitled “The Rise of the Nazis to Power.” (The textbook’s Chronology and Glossary are a helpful resource now, as well as throughout the course.) Secondly, Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* (1935) provides a limited visual picture of the Nazi consolidation of power, and thirdly, Bertolt Brecht’s three brief plays *The Jewish Wife*, *In Search of Justice*, and *The Informer* give a different view of Germany under the Nazis.

When we consider the blatant propaganda of *Triumph of the Will*, we discuss comparatively and in more detail the same questions of documentary and political agenda raised in preliminary fashion about *Night and Fog*. The euphoria of many Germans; their manipulation by Goebbels

and other influential Nazi figures; the cult of the Führer and of Hitler as a god-like savior; as well as Riefenstahl's camera techniques are all the basis of what is generally a very stimulating discussion. It is left to me, with the help of the textbook, to point out that the picture of the Third Reich recorded by Riefenstahl is one-sided and limited.

At this point Brecht's short plays provide a welcome change of view. It is now that I vary my teaching method. Knowing that the rapid and cursory reading accorded *The Jewish Wife* by the average student leaves most of Brecht's subtlety unnoticed, I divide the class into groups of about five, with the assignment of writing out the unrecorded half of the four telephone conversations conducted by Judith Keith. I tell the students that two or three of these groups will have to read their telephone conversations to the class and explain or defend their interpretations. In addition to providing information about middle-class life in Germany in the 1930s, with all its blindness, paranoia, and mistrust, Brecht's *Private Life of the Master Race* enables us to begin distinguishing among the genres: fiction, drama, and poetry.

I then examine in its general historical context and in its specific twentieth-century manifestation the question of antisemitism, which appeared neither in *Night and Fog* nor *Triumph of the Will* and which formed only one aspect of the short Brecht plays. The TV movie *The Longest Hatred* evoked the general picture well, if somewhat tediously. This film explains the early Christian roots of antisemitism, its growth during the Middle Ages, its widespread presence throughout Europe, and its apparent waning through the Enlightenment and during nineteenth-century assimilation. It shows the modern outburst of antisemitism in the twentieth century, its extreme and vicious violence during the Third Reich, and its continued vehement existence even since the end of the Holocaust in the Middle East and elsewhere. Although the film provides useful information, Francis Nicosia covers this material comprehensively in his chapter of the course textbook.

But the film—almost universally criticized by the students as tedious, if informative—serves as a useful foil to the more evocative and artistic movies we view. The opposing aspects of documentary facts, “tedious” or not, on the one hand and of their artistic representation on the other provide for a continuation of the debate begun on the first day and destined to continue throughout the semester.

By week three of the fifteen-week course, it is time to deal with the war, the occupations, the concentration of Jews and others in camps and ghettos, and the deportations. Bernard Gotfryd's book *Anton the Dove Fancier* (1990) is the story of a Polish Jew who lived through the occupation,

ghettoization, deportation, and labor in the work and death camps; who emigrated from Poland to the United States after liberation; and who, in the 1980s, finally recorded his experiences not as a linear account or memoir, but as a series of interconnected short stories devoted to specific people, events, and adventures. These stories cover a span of about fifty years from life in prewar Poland to survival in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Students have no difficulty relating the events in these stories to the historical developments outlined in the textbook. The way Gotfryd deals with these events, the *artistry* of his depiction, the striking turns in fortune, the surprise endings, all enable us to look at the subgenre of the short story and make distinctions among the novel, the memoir, and the short story.

Anton the Dove Fancier tells of life in Poland, of discrimination and antisemitism, and of deportation and death in a series of interdependent short stories told by a participant whose subjectivity and objectivity are never an issue, while Marcie Hershman's *Tales of the Master Race* (1991) provides a similar sequence of interdependent episodes of life in a provincial town in wartime Bavaria. The life of Germans rather than Jews, then, of perpetrators and bystanders rather than victims (with a few exceptions), is her subject matter, and everything is invented rather than remembered. In a sense Hershman's stories take up life in Germany where Brecht left off; wartime existence is portrayed rather than prewar life. Both Hershman and Gotfryd are gifted writers, and student response is enthusiastic; their stories repay careful analysis as well as providing gripping adventures. Hershman is additionally valuable inasmuch as she introduces the subject of euthanasia.

The first nondocumentary or nondocudrama that we view is Jan Kadar's *The Shop on Main Street* (1965). Life in Nazi-occupied territory is once again the topic, but in this case the emphasis is on "Aryanization" of Jewish businesses, and on the human weakness of someone faced with the moral imperative to help. The dreamlike sequences, the experimental slow-motion episodes, and other advanced camera techniques in this relatively early, still black-and-white film, together with its careful structuring, provoke interesting discussion of the cinema as an art form.

Having examined the treatment of the Holocaust in pre-Holocaust productions such as Brecht's short plays and *Triumph of the Will*, having discussed documentary as well as artistic treatment of the subject, and having looked at the literary genres and subgenres of drama and fiction, we now read poems touching on the Holocaust. Theodor Adorno's much quoted, and misunderstood, statement that poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric is a good place to begin. There is no paucity of high-quality poetry