Testimony: The Holocaust and Rwanda (6AAEC070)

Level/Semester: 3rd year module, 1st semester
Course design: Dr Zoe Norridge (on leave in 2016-17)
2016 Convenor: Dr Catherine Gilbert
Teaching: 2-hour seminars
Credits: 15
Assessment: 4,000 word essay (100% of final mark)
Formative: 10 minute seminar presentation

Module Outline

Over the past sixty years writers and film-makers have pushed new aesthetic boundaries in their representations of two major genocides of the twentieth century – the Holocaust and the genocide in Rwanda. Separated by fifty years and occurring on different continents, we will consider both common representative strategies and points of radical divergence.

The crime of genocide, as outlined in the 1948 United Nations Convention, concerns the attempt to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or in part. 70% of Europe’s Jewish population lost their lives during the Holocaust, 77% of Rwanda’s Tutsi population perished during their genocide. Literature and film have key roles to play in bearing witness to this crime and in stressing the nuances and complexities of individual identity in the face of homogenising violence. Art also plays a role in reconciliation and in exploring the aftermath of massive suffering.

We will begin the course with Levi’s classic Holocaust memoir *If This Is a Man*, which introduces questions about genre (poetry and life-writing), testimony, multilingual contexts and the role of literature in exploring atrocity. The possibility of witnessing will then be further explored through further testimonial accounts (*Auschwitz and After*), film (*Shoah, Night and Fog*) and collected oral testimony (*Hasidic Tales*). Throughout the semester we will build on initial close readings by exploring the rich body of theory associated with Holocaust Studies, focusing in particular on Felman and Laub’s *Testimony* and Agamben’s *Remnants of Auschwitz*.

Gourevitch’s *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families* will function as a pivotal text to move us towards comparison with the genocide in Rwanda. We will discuss the ways in which Gourevitch draws on the Holocaust as a point of reference, and emerging issues specific to writing about Africa. These issues are further drawn out through the discussion of literary testimony by local and visiting writers and film-makers (Peck, Hatzfeld, Kabera, Diop). Our readings will reveal an artistic fascination with places of memory – memorials and sites of massacre – that will help us to draw further links between both genocides.

The course contains difficult material – we will discuss strategies for study and further support in the introductory session. Some of these texts are grounded in languages other than English (Italian, Yiddish, French, Kinyarwanda) but all are available in translation. No prior knowledge of the Holocaust or African literature is required.

Schedule of Classes

Week 1  Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man*
Week 2  Claude Lanzmann (Dir), *Shoah*
Week 3  Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*
Week 4  Yaffa Eliach, *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust*
Week 5  Alain Resnais (Dir), *Night and Fog*
Week 6 Reading Week
Week 7 Phillip Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families*
Week 8 Raoul Peck (Dir), *Sometimes in April*
Week 9 Jean Hatzfeld, *Into the Quick of Life*
Week 10 Véronique Tadjo, *The Shadow of Imana*
Week 11 Eric Kabera (Dir), *Keepers of Memory*

**Selected Bibliography**


