MEMORY, MONSTERS & MAGIC: 
THE HOLOCAUST & POPULAR CULTURE

School of Education & Social Policy
The Crown Family Center for Jewish & Israel Studies
Northwestern University
SESP 351: Special Topics
Summer 2020

When
June 22 - July 12 (3 weeks)
Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays
1pm - 4pm (Central), including a break

Where
Zoom, synchronous (live) interactive learning, through Canvas

Instructor
Danny M. Cohen, Ph.D., dannymcohen@northwestern.edu
Office hours by appointment

SESP Distros
History; Literature & Fine Arts; No prerequisites

Course Description
How has the Holocaust come to be represented in popular culture? Through feature films and works of fiction, we will explore how certain tropes and narrative framings affect our perceptions and collective memories of Holocaust history. What lessons from history do popular films and literature attempt to convey? And what unintended lessons do they carry? We will consider how movies and literature about the Holocaust intended for young people may affect their perceptions of atrocities today. And we will ask questions about the gaps and misconceptions that Holocaust film and fiction can leave in their wake. Creative responses to core course texts will be used to assess student learning, and students will have the opportunity to develop an original project connected to the course themes.

Course Texts
Briar Rose by Jane Yolen: https://amzn.to/3eiJoPa
The True Story of Hansel and Gretel by Louise Murphy: https://amzn.to/30OMZ3r
Most feature films will be available to stream through Canvas under ‘Course Reserves’; Some films may need to be rented for a fee; Other texts will be available through weblinks or as PDFs on Canvas

An Intense Three Weeks
Please know that this will be a very intense course. In addition to the challenging yet rewarding content on Holocaust history, this course runs for just three weeks. Over this short amount of time, we will cover a full quarter’s worth of material and assignments for full course credit and a letter grade. Please expect to work every day, as well as at weekends, to read the assigned novels, short stories, and articles, to watch the assigned feature films, and to complete the Response assignments and Open Project.
Synchronous, Interactive Learning

Due to the ongoing pandemic, this course will be held remotely. All class sessions will be synchronous (live) on Zoom (see Canvas for Zoom links). Each three-hour session will include a break. Each class session will be highly interactive and discussion-based (rather than lecture style). Please come to each class session ready to talk about the assigned texts and ready to talk about your Text Response. Please do your best to join each class session by video, rather than audio only. We will be using the live ‘annotation’ feature on Zoom, so using a laptop, tablet, or desktop will be best. Joining by phone will limit your interaction.

Responses and Open Projects

For every core course text that you watch (feature film) or read (novel), you will work independently to post a Response. As you watch or read each text, consider the following questions:

- What did you know about the text before experiencing it?
- If applicable, how was your experience of the text different from your first encounter with it?
- What did the text teach you about the Holocaust? How did it shift your perceptions of the Holocaust?
- What were the key themes of the text? What were the key scenes of the text?
- What were the filmmaker’s or author’s likely intended lessons or goals, and were these goals achieved?
- What is notable, effective, and problematic about the text in terms of its contributions to our collective memory of the Holocaust?
- How does the genre, style, structure, and narrative framing of the text affect its potential lessons?
- How did specific aspects of the text – language, musical score, actors and their performances, accents, cinematography, lighting design, sound design, and so on – affect the text’s potential lessons?
- What gaps are revealed by the text, if any?
- What lingering questions does the text leave you asking?

By the end of the course you will submit an Open Project focused on a non-course feature film (see list on the final page of this document). For your Open Project, you may work solo or with another student or two. If you choose to work with others for your Open Project, each group member should take responsibility for one non-course feature film and your Project should connect the films together in some way.

While there is no required word count for any Response or Open Project, please always submit your best work, make sure that every submission is meaningful to you, and please proof-read your work thoroughly. Always include citations and references. Please post each Response directly into the relevant discussion forum on Canvas. You are encouraged to view others’ Responses and reply to one another.

Each Response and Open Project can take many different forms. Here are some examples:

- Write a formal analytical essay
- Develop a plot for a sequel, prequel, spin-off, remake, or reimagining *
- Write a scene for a sequel, prequel, spin-off, remake, or reimagining *
- Write an original poem *
- Create an original artwork *
- Design a memorial *
- Develop a museum exhibition
- Create a lesson plan
- Build a community discussion guide
- Develop a public program
- A Response can also be an in-depth, stream-of-consciousness-style reflection or set of bullet points (note: if you choose this option, please make sure to proof-read and edit for clarity)

* For all ‘artistic’ Responses and Open Projects, please submit a detailed statement on your creative process.
Mental Health and Support

When delving into Holocaust history, or any violent history, all emotional responses – including numbness – are normal. Be aware that course content, including content about mass violence, abuse, sexual violence, extreme violence against children, suicide, and other content may trigger personal issues for you and your classmates. Please be aware that what you say and write can affect others. Please always try to be respectful and kind. To protect your own mental health, we recommend that you avoid reading course texts, watching videos, and working on course assignments before bedtime. Please note that if I read anything within a written assignment – or if we hear anything during class – of concern, we may need to follow up appropriately. Also, please know that Northwestern’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can provide you support and guidance with personal issues you might have. Another great resource is Northwestern’s Center for Awareness, Response, and Education (CARE), which provides “information, advice, crisis counseling, support, advocacy, referrals and education about sexual violence (including sexual assault, rape, intimate partner violence and stalking) as well as consent, healthy relationships and healthy sexuality to the Northwestern University community.”

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

Academic Integrity

Students in this course are required to comply with the policies found in the booklet, “Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic guide.” All papers and assignments submitted for credit in this course must be submitted electronically unless otherwise instructed by the professor. Your written work may be tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern or to download the guide, visit the official site.

Recording Class Sessions

For the benefit of students in significantly different time zones and for students who experience issues with internet access, each class session will be recorded by the instructor for educational purposes. These recordings will be shared only with students enrolled in the course and will be deleted at the end of the course. All class sessions will be recorded automatically through Zoom and will be available on Canvas.

University Policy on Privacy and Recordings for Online Instruction

Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Unauthorized recording is unethical and may also be a violation of University policy and state law. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact AccessibleNU. Unauthorized use of classroom recordings – including distributing or posting them – is also prohibited. Under the University’s Copyright Policy, faculty own the copyright to instructional materials – including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures and lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up.
Memory, Monsters & Magic, at a Glance

Week 1
1. Hollywood’s Holocaust
2. A True Story
3. The Hero

Week 2
4. The Princess
5. The Prince
6. Time Travel

Week 3
7. Fantasy
8. Reality
9. The Witch

Assignments, at a Glance

Please add these deadlines to your calendar

All deadlines at 9pm (Central)

Tuesday June 23  Response to Escape from Sobibor
Thursday June 25  Response to Schindler's List
Sunday June 28   Response to Life is Beautiful
Monday June 29    Response to Briar Rose
Tuesday June 30    Response to Bent
Thursday July 2    Response to The Devil's Arithmetic
Saturday July 4    Open Project Proposal
Sunday July 5      Response to Inglorious Basterds
Tuesday July 7     Response to Saul fia (Son of Saul)
Thursday July 9    Response to The True Story of Hansel and Gretel
Saturday July 11   Open Project Submission

Instructor

Danny M. Cohen, Ph. D. is a learning scientist with a specialization in Holocaust memory and human rights pedagogy. A distinguished professor of instruction at the School of Education & Social Policy and The Crown Family Center for Jewish & Israel Studies, Danny teaches about Holocaust memory and the design of Holocaust and human rights education. He is the founder of Unsilence, a national nonprofit that uses storytelling, the arts, and serious games to unsilence hidden injustice and support communities to break taboos and have tough conversations about human rights. A faculty fellow of the Auschwitz Jewish Center and an inaugural Commissioner of the Illinois Holocaust & Genocide Commission, he designed and facilitated the pedagogical track of the inaugural docent training program at the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center. In addition to authoring academic articles on Holocaust and human rights education, Danny is a human rights fiction writer. His debut novel, TRAIN, was selected as the inaugural text of the national Museum Teacher Fellows book club of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Originally from London, Danny lives in Chicago with his husband and their daughter. He is also a visual artist, a singer-songwriter, and a member of the folk-rock band They Won’t Win. www.dannymcohen.com
Course Schedule

Week 1

1  HOLLYWOOD’S HOLOCAUST: Monday June 22
   ▪ Start to read novel Briar Rose written by Jane Yolen
   ▪ Watch the feature film Escape from Sobibor directed by Jack Gold (1987)
     (available on YouTube and included in Amazon Prime)
   ▪ Before Wednesday’s class, read the short story Through the Walls
     (PDF on Canvas)

2  A TRUE STORY: Wednesday June 24
   ▪ Discuss Escape from Sobibor directed by Jack Gold (1987)
   ▪ Discuss Through the Walls written by Primo Levi (1986, translated 1989)
   ▪ Watch the feature film Schindler’s List directed by Steven Spielberg (1993)
     (streaming on Canvas)
   ▪ Before Friday’s class, read the short story This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen
     written by Tadeusz Borowski (1946, translated 1967)
     (available here)

3  THE HERO: Friday June 26
   ▪ Discuss Schindler’s List directed by Steven Spielberg (1993)
   ▪ Discuss This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen
     written by Tadeusz Borowski (1946, translated 1967)
   ▪ Watch the feature film Life is Beautiful directed by Roberto Benigni (1997)
     (streaming on Canvas)
   ▪ Before Monday’s class, look at the drawing and read the poem and short story
     Children’s Story drawn and written by Ava Kadishson Schieber (in Soundless Roar, 2002)
     (PDF on Canvas)
   ▪ Read the novel Briar Rose written by Jane Yolen (1992)
     and post your Response by 9pm on Monday June 29
Week 2

4  THE PRINCESS: Monday June 29

- Discuss Life is Beautiful directed by Roberto Benigni (1997)
- Discuss Children’s Story drawn and written by Ava Kadishson Schieber (2002)
- Post your Response to the novel Briar Rose written by Jane Yolen (1992) by 9pm on Monday June 29
- Watch the feature film Bent directed by Sean Mathias (1997) (streaming on Canvas) and post your Response by 9pm on Tuesday June 30

5  THE PRINCE: Wednesday July 1

- Discuss Briar Rose written by Jane Yolen (1992)
- Discuss Bent directed by Sean Mathias (1997)
- Watch the feature film The Devil’s Arithmetic directed by Donna Deitch (1999) (streaming on Canvas) and post your Response by 9pm on Thursday July 2
- Before Friday’s class, read Marie (1965), The Teddy Bear (1970), and an untitled poem (1971) from Auschwitz and After written by Charlotte Delbo (republished together in 1995) (PDF on Canvas)
- Start to read the novel The True Story of Hansel and Gretel written by Louise Murphy

6  TIME TRAVEL: Friday July 3

- Discuss The Devil’s Arithmetic directed by Donna Deitch (1999)
- Submit a proposal for your Open Project by 9pm on Saturday July 4
- Watch the feature film Inglourious Basterds directed by Quentin Tarantino (2009) (streaming on Canvas) and post your Response by 9pm on Sunday July 5
- Before Monday’s class, read Irma Greze written by Gisella Perl (in I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz, 1948, republished 2019) (PDF on Canvas)
Week 3

7  FANTASY: Monday July 6
- Discuss *Inglourious Basterds* directed by Quentin Tarantino (2009)
- Discuss *Irma Greve* written by Gisella Perl (1948, republished 2019)
- Watch the feature film *Saul fia (Son of Saul)* directed by László Nemes (2015) (streaming on Canvas) and post your Response by 9pm on Tuesday July 7
- Before Wednesday’s class, read the essay *The Gray Zone* written by Primo Levi (in *The Drowned and The Saved*, 1988) (PDF on Canvas)

8  REALITY: Wednesday July 8
- Discuss *Saul fia (Son of Saul)* directed by László Nemes (2015)
- Discuss *The Gray Zone* written by Primo Levi (1988)
- Read the novel *The True Story of Hansel and Gretel* written by Louise Murphy (2003) and post your Response by 9pm on Thursday July 9

9  THE WITCH: Friday July 10
- Discuss *The True Story of Hansel and Gretel* written by Louise Murphy (2003)
- Submit your Open Project by 9pm on Saturday July 11

Open Project Feature Films

*Judgment at Nuremberg* directed by Stanley Kramer (1961) (streaming on Canvas)
*Europa Europa* directed by Agnieszka Holland (1991) (streaming on Canvas)
*The Grey Zone* directed by Tim Blake Nelson (2001) (streaming on Canvas)
*Conspiracy* directed by Frank Pierson (2001) (streaming on Canvas)
*The Pianist* directed by Roman Polanski (2003) (available to rent on Amazon)
*Fateless* directed by Lajos Koltai (2005) (available to stream on Amazon Prime)
*Defiance* directed by Edward Zwick (2008) (available to rent on Amazon)
*The Reader* directed by Stephen Daldry (2008) (streaming on Canvas)
*The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* directed by Mark Herman (2008) (streaming on Canvas)
*Denial* directed by Mick Jackson (2016) (streaming on Canvas)
*Jojo Rabbit* directed by Taika Waititi (2019) (available to rent on Amazon)