

Theorising Testimony – Holocaust Literature

Way beyond its routine use in the legal context, the discourse of testifying is at the fore of contemporary cultural narratives, especially when it comes to the discussion of the Holocaust. Testimony is not only taken as a genre of texts, as a collection of oral or written accounts of survivors/witnesses, as personalized documents of the Holocaust and its Aftermath. Testimony also refers to a –sometimes impossible, sometimes failing, sometimes limited - speech act, a process of speaking of oneself, a process of addressing a you.

The course invites interested individuals to join a core reading group dedicated to considering and discussing key texts in the literature on testimony. Over the course of the semester we want to explore fundamental historical, psychoanalytical, poetical and philosophical dimensions of testimony, and thus reassess the manner in which we approach the reading of testimony. The course's aim is to resist the tendency to universalize or collectivize Holocaust testimony, and instead to revive the particular by uncovering the multiple layers within the notion of testimony: What do we refer to when we say 'testimony'? **How do different disciplines conceive and contain testimony? What allows testimony to be heard or understood?** And what is the relation between the act of witnessing and testifying, and the acts of writing and of reading?

Requirements:

This is a **close reading seminar**. Please prepare the texts for each session carefully. We can only have a discussion, if you have read the texts. Additionally you should prepare a short introduction for one of the discussed texts and write an essay at the end of the semester.

There will be a course reader at the Library of the German Department. The reader is also online available (<http://elektra.ff.cuni.cz>). The seminar will be conducted in English; Readings and discussions will be in English.

Date	Program	Readings / Documentaries
4. 10.2012	Introduction	
11.10.2012	Contemporary documentary	[film] Marika Schmiedt: Legacy/Vermächtnis (A 2011)
18.10.2012	Psychoanalysis: The Impossible witness	Dori Laub: An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival, p75-94. [19]
25.10.2012	Literary Studies: The Genre of Testimony	Robert Eaglestone: Identification and the Genre of Testimony, p. 15-41 [26]
1.11	Oral History: Context and Expectations	Henry Greenspan: Introduction. From Testimony to Recounting (1-7); The Context of Recounting: Survivors and Their Listeners (41-76)[41]
8.11.2012	Feminist/postcolonial revision: The Limitation of Speaking	Gayatri Spivak: Can the Subaltern speak?
15.11.2012	Philosophy: Demeure 1: Testimony as Passion.	Jacques Derrida: Demeure: Fiction and Testimony. p. 13-43[30]
22.11.2012	Philosophy: Demeure 2: Derrida reads Blanchot	Maurice Blanchot: The Instant of my Death, p. 1-12 Jacques Derrida: Demeure: Fiction and Testimony. p. 51-103 [63]
29.11.2012	A Perpetrator's testimony-documentary	[film] Ruth Becker: Jenseits des Krieges (A 1996)

6.12.2012	Philosophical Approach 2	Giorgio Agamben: The Witness, p.11-32
13.12.2012	Philosophical Approach 3: Revising moral philosophy	Judith Butler: An account of oneself, p. 3-40 [37]
20.12.2012	Conclusion	
3.1.2013	Reflection of the class;	Shoshana Felman: Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching, p. 1-56 [55]

Literature:

Giorgio Agamben: Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive. New York: Zone Books 1999

Maurice Blanchot: The Instant of my Death. In: Blanchot/Derrida: Demeure. The Instant of my Death. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press 1994, p. 1-12.

Judith Butler: Giving an account of oneself. New York.: Fordham Univ. Press 2005.

Jacques Derrida: Demeure: Fiction and Testimony. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press 1994.

Robert Eaglestone: The Holocaust and the Postmodern. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press 2004

Shoshana Felman/Dori Laub (ed.): Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History. New York: Routledge 1992.

- Shoshana Felman: Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching, p. 1-56
- Dori Laub: An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival, p. 75-94.
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Henry Greenspan: On Listening to Holocaust Survivors. Beyond Testimony. St.Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House 2010

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Can the Subaltern speak? In: Cary Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg (ed.): Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. Chicago: University of Illinois Press 1988